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Sons o' Cormac

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THE SONS O' CORMAC

THE
SONS O' CORMAC
AN' TALES OF OTHER MEN'S SONS

BY
ALDIS DUNBAR

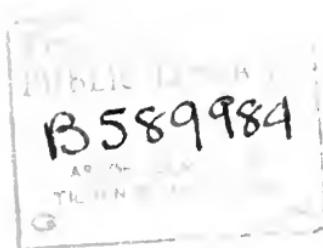


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TO

THE LADS O' ME HEART

MON WOOD
SILKWOOD
WILLOWWOOD

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THE SONS O' CORMAC

Sure, day in an' day out, 'tis beatin' me poor weary brains I am; for no sooner am I asther hearin' the pattherin' o' feet comin' toward me than 'tis up an' hide, or tell a tale o' heroes in times past. When an' ever the day 'll come for them to tire is more nor mortal man, let alone one workin' in this garden, can be asther gues-sin'. 'Twill be a restful day, that, when the masther packs the whole armful o' them off to school.

Whist, now! What's that? Ah-h, now, the swate voices o' them laughin' among the bushes. Sure, 'tis meself is caught entirely.

THE SONS O' CORMAC

I

THE CONSTANT GREEN JERKIN'

[“A story is it? An’ the grass a-perishin’ for the want o’ watherin’ this very evenin’! Well, have yer will, an’ tell the masther yerselves what was afther hindherin’ me from me work.”]

’TWAS back o’ the years, in the days when the Little People were a power in the land, an’ there was fightin’ a plenty with the Danes an’ their like—that Cormac without a Kingdom lived by the Lough o’ the Eagle with his three sons.

Now these were Dermond o’ the Bow, an’ Eiveen the Swift—an’ the youngest of all, that was Conan o’ the Long Arms; an’ some called this last Conan the Singer, for he had skill in

singin' more than any man on the shores o' Moyle, an' the birds came an' sat on the trees to listen when he played the harp.

I tell ye, Dermond o' the Bow was great at the huntin', an' could send his long arrows across the Lough o' the Eagle, an' strike the wild ducks that swam in the reeds; but Cormac his father, that had lost his kingdom by raison o' the Danes, could sit at the door o' his cabin an' bring down the sparrow-hawk that flew across the fir trees. An' the fir trees grew where the reeds ended.

An' Eiveen the Swift could run beyant the deer in the forest, an' turn them toward his brother, in the chase; but King Cormac, for all his white hair, was swifter still, an' could keep abreast o' the wind as it blew over the green grass, an' sent the little waves to break on the shores o' the Lough.

An' Conan stayed by the cabin, an' brought in wood for the fire, an' roasted the meat when his brothers came home weary from the hills. But when they were off in the early mornin', an' King Cormac sleepin' before the fire on his bed o' rushes, Conan would sit by the door with

his harp, an' sing till the fishes poked their heads out o' the Lough to hear—an' even the old king himself could do nothin' greater nor that.

So time went past, an' King Cormac gave up livin' because o' being so old; an' there was nothing for him to leave to his three sons beyant his blessin' an' the shabby old green jerkin that he wore.

" 'Tis the chiefest treasure I have," says he, "an' I give it yees with me blessin'. Let none scorn it, or 'twill shame him in the end." An' with that he died, an' they buried him on the shore o' the Lough, with a great pile o' stones to mark the spot.

So when the night came, Dermond an' Eiveen lay by the fire; but Conan the Singer sat in the moonlight, playin' an' singin' to break the very hearts o' those that heard; an' even his two brothers were a-sorrowin', for all they were stout an' fierce.

An' says Dermond o' the Bow: "Give me the green jerkin; for 'tis I am the oldest, an' should wear it for a sign o' mournin' for King Cormac our father."

An' Eiveen the Swift brought it from the corner where it was hangin', an' slipped it on his brother's arms. But Conan kept on playin' in the moonlight, an' lookin' down the path o' the stars in the wathers o' the Lough.

An' as he sat there, there came a great noise o' folk ridin' down the mountain side, rattlin' the stones under the feet o' the horses an' jinglin' their spurs, an' callin' one to the other. An' at the head o' the line rode two together.

One was a little, shrivelled old man, with eyes that burned like coals o' fire in his face; an' his hair was thin an' grey; an' while he was no giant like King Cormac, yet he wore rich armour, an' a crown on his head. An' beside him, on a white horse, came the fairest girl that had been seen in that place for many a day. Her dress was o' the green silk, with a mantle o' scarlet hangin' from her shoulders; an' her hair was shinin' yellow, so that one could scarce see the band o' wrought gold in it, tellin' her for a real king's daughter. An' behind came servants on horse an' afoot, dressed in bright cloth.

The moon was shinin' till 'twas light as day,

an' they rode up to where Conan was singin', an' sat on their horses lookin' at him. Then his brothers, hearin' the noise, came to the door an' stared out; but Conan sang on, never carin' for naught but the pile o' stones by the shore.

Then the old man, that was a king, spoke to Dermond o' the Bow.

"Is it here that is the dwellin' o' Cormac without a Kingdom?"

"Ay," says Dermond. "Yestermorn it was that same; but this night he lies beneath the cairn o' stones that is on the edge o' the Lough."

"Then is a strrong man passed," answered the old man. "An' we may turn back as we came."

"An' who may ye be?" asked Eiveen the Swift, pushin' forward.

"King Murdough am I, an' this is me daughter Maurya, whom I would give to the champion who shall help me against the Danes. An' Cormac was the strrongest man of his hands in all the land, though his hair was white. For that would I have given him me daughter, an' he should have ruled me kingdom for me.

Then would naught have hindhered me from spendin' me days in search o' deep learnin'."

An' the princess nodded as he spoke, but her eyes were on Conan.

"Try me," says Dermond, throwin' back his black hair, to look more closely at the princess.

Says King Murdough: "But 'tis not alone a strrong man I must have. 'Tis the *strongest* —an' one with wisdom in his heart to rule men."

"Try me," says Dermond again, "for I am the first-born son o' King Cormac, an' none can stand up against me an' live to tell of it."

When King Murdough looked at him, an' saw what a fine strrong fellow he was, afther a bit it seemed to him that this might prove a champion to his mind; so he called a servant to bring forward a horse.

"Come to me court for three days," says he. "An' if ye stand trial o' strength with the best o' me men, an' do as ye boast—then shall ye be me son, an' rule for me."

Then Dermond mounted the horse an' rode off up the mountain with King Murdough—an' the princess beside him, with the golden hair

that made light shine in the air as she turned to look back at Conan, where he sat playin' his sorrowin' for his father.

Now afther Dermond o' the Bow rode across the mountains to where King Murdough held court, he had a fine room given him, an' all the walls were covered with silver cloth; an' two servin' men went afther him wherever he walked, to carry his bow an' arrows. An' the princess sent him a sword an' shield.

So the first thing in the mornin', King Murdough called him out in the courtyard, an' bid him show how far he could shoot. An' Dermond shot across the castle, an' killed a pigeon that perched on the wall beyant. An' 'twas himself was more surprised than any, for never before had he done that well.

"You have shot eastward; now try to the west," says the princess.

So he looked where the forest was, to the west—an' never had he seen so clear—an' there was somethin' stirrin' among the bushes. Dermond bent his bow an' took aim, an' the arrow flew over wall an' stream—an' a deer leaped up in the air, an' fell dead in the open.

King Murdough nodded his head when he saw that, for he was thinkin' that this was sure the man he needed; an' he led him in, an' made a great feast for him. But the servants o' the princess stood aside, an' laughed at his old ragged shoes, an' at the faded green jerkin that was nigh on too small for his shoulders.

“ ‘Tis a scarecrow, an’ no prince **at all**,” says one.

“Put him up on the castle wall, an’ he’ll fright the Danes as he is,” says another.

Now Dermond was a proud man o’ his birth, an’ he pretended not to hear them, thinkin’ o’ the fine things he would have when he wed the princess. So the first day went over without more trouble.

Then on the second day came the best fighters o’ King Murdough’s men, an’ Dermond had never been so strhong in fightin’ as he was then. Down went every man he put hand on, an’ none could stand up afther.

That night there was another feast; an’ more nor before the maids that served Princess Maurya passed behind his chair an’ laughed to each other at his poor dress. An’ sleepin’ that

night, an' wakin' in the mornin', he was hot with anger at them. He took the sword that the princess had given him, an' cut a great piece o' the silver cloth from the wall o' the room an' made himself a cloak of it.

"There's none 'll dare to spake of it to-morrow, when I've married the king's daughter," says he, an' he threw the old green jerkin back o' the door.

When he came to the field where he was to show his strength, there was no man willin' to match with him. Then King Murdough gave word to blow the horn on the castle wall, tellin' all who heard that here was a great champion, an' that who wanted could try fightin' with him.

At last Eocha, a great, stout man, that was chief cook for the king's table, put his head out o' the door.

"Fight will I," says he. "Greasy apron against silver doublet, an' see which wins."

Dermond looked at him scornful like, for he was sure o' whippin' him, an' he stepped up bravely. An' there before he knew it, sure 'twas Dermond o' the Bow was lyin' on the

stones o' the courtyard, beaten fair an' square, under the very eyes o' the princess.

‘ An’ then others took heart an’ came up to fight, while poor Dermond had no heart to battle with more o’ them, an’ no understandin’ how all this had come about.

“Fine feathers make the peacock,” laughed the girls. “Where now is yer green jerkin, Dermond the Champion?”

So, all sudden like, it came to him what his father had said, an’ he rushed off to the room where he’d slept, lookin’ for the jerkin; but no sign of it was to be seen near nor far. An’ in the doorway stood the princess, smilin’ at him.

“What has gone wrong?” she asked.

“Lady Maurya,” says Dermond, “me jerkin is gone, an’ me power with it. Let me go from here, for I’m disgraced.”

“An’ have ye no strength o’ yer own, lackin’ it?” asked she.

“Ay,” he answered, “but not more nor other men.”

“Then here is a purse o’ gold, Dermond o’ the Bow, that ye may go off to some far king-

dom, where ye can win another for yer wife. But I am not for ye."

An' he crept out by the low door at the back o' the castle, an' went off over the hills to seek his fortune, an' came back no more.

Now while these things were doin' in King Murdough's castle, Eiveen the Swift an' Conan his brother were livin' quietly by the Lough o' the Eagle. Each mornin' Conan took his harp to the edge o' the wather an' played a lament for Cormac. An' when the third mornin' came, there on the cairn was somethin' strange. Conan went to see, an' 'twas none other than the green jerkin.

He called out aloud to Eiveen, who came runnin'. "What is it?" says he.

"The green jerkin has come back without Dermond in it," says Conan.

"More like that he has been here an' left it for us while we were sleepin'," says Eiveen.

"Then 'twill bring him no luck," says Conan. "Did not Cormac our father say that whoever scorned it would be shamed by it in the end?"

"I will wear it for thought o' him," answered

Eiveen. "An' 'tis in me mind to go to the court an' visit Dermond an' his princess."

With no more words, off went Eiveen, like the wind. Never had he run so swiftly, an' without wearyin', though the way was up hill an' over rocks. An' when he came to the castle he gave a great rap at the gate.

"Who stands knockin'?" called out the guard.

"Eiveen the Swift, brother to Dermond o' the Bow. Let me come in."

Well, the guard ran to Princess Maurya, with word that the brother o' Dermond was at the gate, clad in the same old green jerkin.

"Send him to me," says the princess; an' she watched the door close as she heard his feet comin' near. But when she saw him, she leaned back in her chair to hear what he should say. An' Eiveen the Swift looked at her with cold eyes, an' thought how well he would like to be in his brother's shoes.

"Where is Dermond o' the Bow?" he asked.

"Gone to seek his fortune in other lands," says Princess Maurya.

"An' have ye a champion betther nor him?" says Eiveen.

“Nay,” says she. “He was thrown to the ground by Eocha, who is the cook. I will have no cook for a champion, but a right king’s son, even though he be poor.”

“Then will I try me fortune,” says Eiveen. An’ with him it went as it had with Dermond. The first day he threw down each man that came against him; an’ first of all was fat Eocha the cook sent sprawlin’ among the stones.

But when the maids saw Eiveen they laughed again.

“A pretty set o’ champions come for our princess, with their old green coats; when she wears nothin’ poorer nor silk an’ stuff o’ gold.”

Eiveen says never a word, thinkin’ how he would turn them all away into the cold when he was married to Princess Maurya.

An’ the second day he shot an arrow across the castle wall, an’ killed a hawk that was carryin’ off a chicken from beyant the river. An’ again he cut a lock o’ hair from the head o’ Cleena, daughter o’ Feargus the Black, as she bent to draw wather at the ford.

But naught held back the girls from castin’ looks at his old coat, in the hall, an’ saying to

each other—pretendin' to be whisperin'—to see how well King Cormac had done for his sons.

Then Eiveen grew hot with rage, an' went off to his bed. An' all night he tossed about, thinkin' o' the gay silken an' velvet clothes that the other men wore as though they were naught worth speakin' of. An' when it began to grow light he rose from his bed an' tore down a piece o' gold cloth that hung in the doorway, an' made a doublet to wear.

“Sure,” thought he, “it’ll all be mine by to-morrow. ‘Tis but borrowin’ me own.” An’ the jerkin he left lyin’ by the window.

Then afther a bit he came runnin’ back for it—for the fine gold doublet was all split up from his bein’ thrown by King Murdough’s groom. But the jerkin was not where he had left it.

“An’ are ye beaten, too?” asked Princess Maurya.

“That am I—an’ a worse fate befall Kevin the groom for trippin’ me on the pavement,” answered Eiveen. So she turned away, an’ sent him a purse o’ money by the hands o’ Maive the Fair—one o’ the maids that had laughed

at him in the hall. But in Maive's heart rose sorrowin' for Eiveen's ill fortune, an' when she opened the gate to let him pass out, she gave him her hand an' followed him, an' together they went out into the world to win fortune.

Then it so happened that a second time Conan the Singer rose in early mornin' an' found the old jerkin lyin' on the grave o' Cormac.

"Scorn has come again," thought he. "Now 'tis me turn to wear it for love o' him who lies by the shore. An' it shall go hard with one who takes it from me."

Then he took his harp on his arm, an' went away up the mountain pass, where the eagle was callin' to its young.

At last he came to the castle, an' sat down by the gate, an' struck his harp, till all the men an' maids ran to see who was there. An' even the Princess Maurya stepped down from her great chair, an' went to the courtyard.

When she saw Conan, her eyes laughed with joy, an' she bade him enter, an' herself led him to King Murdough.

"Here is a champion again," says she.

“Nay,” says Conan, “I came to search for me brothers.”

“They have gone to far countries,” answered the princess, “to find fortune. Will ye try yer own? Have ye a mind for fightin’, an’ for bein’ me father’s champion?”

“That have I, though it has never come to me to fight with men,” says Conan; an’ he bent down low an’ kissed her hand.

Then King Murdough gave him lodgin’ for the night; an’—by order o’ the princess—’twas a small bare room. An’ in the mornin’ Conan came into the courtyard, an’ looked at all the men who were there waitin’ to fight with him.

“An’ did Dermond meet these?” he asked o’ the king.

“That he did,” answered King Murdough, “an’ gained the masthery for a day.”

“Then will I do as well as he,” says Conan.

So Princess Maurya brought out a sword an’ a shield, an’ stood on the broad top o’ the castle wall to see the fightin’; an’ Conan beat all the warriors back, like a brave lad.

Then, when King Murdough made the feast, Conan sat beside the princess in his old jerkin,

that had taken many a cut that day; an' afther a while he chanced to look up an' see that the maids were makin' jest o' him.

"Why are ye laughin', me girls?" he asked; an' the princess waited to see what would come of it this time.

"Because o' the ragged coat ye wear," says Cleena. "Have the sons o' Cormac but one jerkin between them?"

"Let none scorn it," says Conan, "or 'twill shame him in the end. For a token o' mournin' an' for love o' Cormac do I wear it; an' I fear to meet no man because of it, though he be dressed in silks an' satin." An' he turned to Princess Maurya, an' thought no more o' their foolish words. An' all night he dreamed o' her golden hair, until the room shone with the rememberin' of it.

In the mornin' he was ready for another trial; an' when they brought him the bow, he bent it bravely, an' sent his first arrow whirrin' through the open window of a cabin that stood beyant the ford, an' clipped out a candle that burned on the shelf within. An' for his second shot, he slew two great hawks that flew above

the castle wall, an' together they fell into the river.

So that trial was passed, an' Conan went into the great hall, an' sat at the feet o' the princess, an' played an' sang until all the noise o' the court ceased for love o' his song.

Yet in the evenin', at the feastin', the king's men spoke scornin' words o' his torn jerkin.

"Will ye go against the Danes in it?" asked Feargus the Black. "Then may they see that ye are but a poor man's son, an' no prince."

"To-morrow shall ye take that word back," says Conan o' the Long Arms, "for no man shall make a jest o' Cormac the King while me arms have strength."

An' all through the night Conan dreamed o' the blue eyes o' Princess Maurya.

When the mornin' came, Feargus stood waitin' in the yard for Conan to come to him; and Princess Maurya watched to see what should befall. Then Conan came from his bed, an' on his back was the green jerkin, an' in his hand the sword o' the princess.

An' there was no chance at all for Feargus the Black, though he was the best man in the

court o' the king. Sure, his sword went flyin' through the air, an' fell outside the wall.

When they saw that, there was no one left to risk fightin' with Conan, an' the king led him into the great wall with his own hands.

“Now will ye have Oona o' the White Hands to be yer wife; an' room to live here in me castle, with ten pieces o' gold for every day, an' silk to wear; or will ye live in a cabin outside the wall, an' wear yer old jerkin, like a poor kerne?”

“Outside the wall is for me, if Princess Maurya will be there too,” answered Conan. “But me jerkin will I wear, an' none but her will I wed.”

“Nay, if ye take her, together may yees wander into the world, for I give no gold with her.”

“Then out into the world we go,” says Conan blithely, holdin' out his hand to her, an' she put hers into it with gladness.

“An' call ye that wisdom?” says King Murdough. “Would ye rule men afther that fashion?”

“Who should rule men but him that rules his

own?" says Conan. An' the princess says "Ay."

"Then have ye won yer rulin' fairly," says King Murdough, "an' shall have her an' the kingdom. An' as for the jerkin, 'tis yer robe of honour at this court; an' who says aught ill of it, to him shame shall come."

So King Murdough made great rejoicin's, an' gave his daughter to Conan, callin' him Conan o' the Kingdom, for a sign that he was the greatest man in it.

An' so far went the fear o' his name that neither Dane nor any other enemy dared set foot in the land for many a day, lest they might catch sight o' the green jerkin which gave power to the long arms o' Conan.

[“But why did the princess put Conan in the little bare room?” “Ah, when we guess why she did that, we'll know all o' the tale that's untold. An' now be off with ye, till I wather me green grass.”]

II

THE HARVESTIN' O' DERMOND

[“No, I’ve naught to tell yees the day, so out o’ the barn with yees. Here’s all the harness to be rubbed bright before the masther goes out dhrivin’. What? ’Tis rainin’? An’ yees can’t be afther takin’ yer walk? Ay! ay! Well, sit ye all down beyant in the corner there, an’ I’ll be thinkin’ about it.”]

YE’LL be mindin’ how Dermond—him that they called Dermond o’ the Bow—afther Princess Maurya gave him the purse o’ gold, slipped out o’ the little low door at the back o’ King Murdough’s castle, an’ was off without no more words to no one? Sure, he was mighty shamed to have been tumbled over by a fat cook, like a bag o’ fresh ground meal on the floor o’ the mill. So he turned toward the hills, an’ walked

on for many a mile, not lookin' to right nor to left, nor even mindin' that he was still wearin' the cloak o' silver cloth that had brought him disaster.

'Twas early mornin' when he left the little small door behind him ; but 'twas nigh on night, an' the shadows runnin' long down the hillside, when he first thought on where his feet might be afther takin' him. He'd little heart whatever to be goin' back to the Lough o' the Eagle, where his two brothers were livin', to be lettin' on to them that he was beaten.

"Nay," says he, " 'tis far betther to be heedin' Lady Maurya's words. There's many kingdoms in the land where a stout-hearted warrior 'll find fightin' to his hand, an' that's where I'll win me a princess fairly for me wife."

An' that was brave talkin', for Dermond had neither sword nor shield to his side, but just his long bow an' a little sharp knife for cuttin' up meat.

Now the wind was beginnin' to rise at his back, an' it came sweepin' up the mountain side, an' he had to stand an' meet it a bit, to keep on his feet at all. An' all in a breath his gay

silver cloak was caught by the gale an' torn away from him, an' it went whirlin' in the wind down the way he'd been comin', where 'twas darkenin' with heavy clouds.

Then he looked ahead, up the Path o' the Rocks that he was climbin', an' at the top of it, where the way turned down to the valley beyant, he saw the red light o' the setting sun.

"Better to push on than to turn back without reachin' the top, an' all for the sake o' that cloak o' bad fortune," thought Dermond. "Silver for sorrow, an' I've learned that lesson to me cost."

So up he went, an' the light kep' growin' brighter, until when he stood at the top o' the hill, he could scarce see the valley before him for the shinin' o' the sky.

'Twas a broad valley, that, for all the way into it was so narrow; an' 'twas shtrange to him, bein' no place that he had ever crossed in his huntin'. All around it were steep hills, with sides that no man could climb, barrin' he had the wings o' the grey hawk an' the bold heart of it. An' beyant the plain, stretchin' to

the west, was a deep forest. But nowhere was sign o' livin' men.

For just a moment he looked back over the road he'd come by: an' as he did that same he heard a small chucklin' laugh round behind him. Sure, he turned again in a jiffy, but all that met his eye was a glint o' somethin' red, down among the rocks beside the path.

Well, he was afther it with all his speed, but never a bit did it come in his road, though he looked every way at once. An' at last, when he found himself by the foot o' the path, down on the broad plain, for all the world he could not tell by what way he had come down the rocks.

But for all the sunset was fadin' fast, there was no fear o' the night in the heart o' Dermond. He looked over the valley, an' saw far off where four oak trees grew close by each other, like they were the corners of a cabin: an' when he reached them he thought in his mind that there he would sleep till the morn's mornin', supper or none.

'Twas dark then, an' he lay down on the long grass, an' soon fell to sleepin', an' never woke

nor stirred till 'twas far past moonrise, when he leaped up all sudden like, thinkin' he heard his name. But none answered his callin'.

An' as he stepped close to one o' the oaks—that which stood to the south (an' 'twas that way he would have taken to return to the cabin o' Cormac, his father)—he heard the far-off playin' of a harp; an' it came to him that 'twas Conan, his youngest brother, was touchin' it. So he listened, quiet like, an' sure enough 'twas a lament for Cormac without a Kingdom was ringin' in his ears.

Then right close, almost at his feet, was a sound like a little small voice laughin', as he had heard it on the Path o' the Rocks. He quick reached out his hand to catch whoever it was, an' went creepin' toward it, till he touched the next tree, that was toward the east. An' as he stood gropin' round, he heard other laughin'—like that o' the maids o' Princess Maurya, who had jeered at him in the hall for wearin' the old jerkin o' King Cormac, for which he had torn the silver cloth from the wall an' made himself a cloak, an' lost his power by that same.

An' a girl's voice was sayin': "A pretty set o' champions come for our princess, with their old green coats; when she wears nothin' poorer nor silk an' stuff o' gold." An' more he listened, an' heard the voice o' Eiveen, his brother that was next him in years, an' that o' Princess Maurya answerin'. An' the small voice down by his feet chuckled again.

By now Dermond guessed well that some spell lay on the trees, makin' his ears hear what was far away; so he went on to the third, which was to the north o' the rest, an' hearkened; but there he heard naught but the sighin' o' wind, an' the beatin' o' waves on the shore. An' he knew that the sea was many a mile beyant.

He thought o' the Little People that had favoured Cormac, his father; an' as the moon rose higher, he looked to see them under the branches o' the oaks; but they must have crept under the fallen acorn cups, for not a red cap could he spy.

At last he put his hand on the trunk o' the fourth tree, an' that was west, an' farther up the valley than he had gone. An' seemin' as if

'twas comin' out o' the wide spreadin' branches
or the flutterin' o' the leaves, he heard the
speakin' of a shtrange voice in his ears; an'
'twas an old man's, sayin':—

“ ‘Tis time for the plantin’ o’ me field. Heart
o’ me life, is the seed ready?”

An’ the one answerin’ had the softest voice
that had ever been heard o’ Dermond. Sure,
the tremblin’ o’ Conan’s harp was harsh be-
side it.

“Ay, father,” ‘twas sayin’, “an’ who comes
to sow it? An’ when will be the harvestin’?”

“That shall be known when one comes for
hirin’. None may sow that seed but a man
without fear o’ fortune; an’ none may harvest
it with doubt in his heart.”

Dermond was listenin’ hard; but just then a
cloud passed across the moon, an’ the words
ended. Long time he waited to hear if that soft
voice wasn’t speakin’, but ‘twas no use at all;
an’ at last he wandhered out away from the
trees an’ into the plain, an’ lay down on the
open ground an’ fell to sleepin’ again, for he
was weary with all his climbin’.

This time when he woke, ‘twas with more

laughin' in his ears, an' the sun shinin' bright as ever. He gripped his bow tight, an' sprang to his feet in a great haste; an' there, standin' a little ways off, was a girl, all in pale green like the young birches in the heart o' spring, and the laughter was runnin' over her face like ripplin' wather.

Dermond stood dumbfounded, for he had nigh forgot where he was, an' he looked round wonderin' like.

Then says the girl, that had never moved away at all from where she was standin':—

“ ‘Tis lost ye are.”

An' Dermond remembered the night, and knew it to be the soft voice o' her that had asked o' the harvestin'.

“Nay,” says he. “O' me own will came I here, seekin' fortune.”

“An' what like is the fortune that ye seek?” says she.

“To find a kingdom where is good fightin' for one with a stout heart an' a strhong arm; an' to get me a princess for me wife,” says Dermond.

Then the girl laughed again, an' the sound o' that was like wind in the willow trees.

“ ‘Tis a man’s thought, truly; an’ I doubt not ye’ll find kings’ daughters a plenty, foldin’ their hands an’ waitin’ to have ye come an’ do some fine fightin’ to win them. As if that was the bravest work for a man! Did ye expect to be afther findin’ yer princess growin’ on a bush in this rich kingdom?” an’ she waved her hand toward the valley.

“Where she is, there I’ll find her; ay, an’ win her,” answered Dermond.

“Have ye no fear, that ye speak so bold?” asked the girl.

“I fear naught between the flyin’ clouds above the hills an’ the runnin’ wather near our feet,” says Dermond.

“An’ what man are ye?” says she.

“Dermond o’ the Bow, eldest son o’ him who was Cormac without a Kingdom.”

“An’ for me name,” says the soft voice, “ ‘tis Etáin, daughter o’ Dughall the Wise, who dwells beyant the forest to the west.”

“An’ is there none dwells with him but yerself?” asked Dermond.

“Why ask ye that?” says Etáin.

“ ‘Tis time for plantin’ his field,” went on Dermond, hardly knowin’ why he said it. An’ Etáin looked at him mazed like.

“How knew ye that, seein’ that no man can tell when the hour comes but Dughall himself?”

“ ‘Twas at moonrise I heard himself say it,” answered Dermond. “Yonder among the trees.”

“Then must ye have the favour o’ the Little People, for ‘tis risk an’ peril for mortal man to pass near the Four Oaks o’ the Valley when the sun is high—far more at moonrise. Will ye come with me to Dughall?”

“Ay, if me fortune lies that road,” says he.

“That is as ye make it for yerself,” says Etáin; an’ for just a moment she stood lookin’ at him, an’ seein’ what a splendid fine strrong man he was, with his shinin’ eyes an’ the black hair wavin’ far down over his shouldhers. An’ he looked at her blue eyes an’ rose-red lips that laughed whenever she began to think of anythin’; an’ there was no more rememberin’ o’ Princess Maurya—no, nor o’ the maids that served her, for him.

Then Etáin nodded her head, an' turned an' went over the grass toward the forest so swift that Dermond had all his feet could do to keep pace with her. There was no more speakin', but just followin', as she led the way over grass hillocks an' into the dark wood.

'Twas more nor one time the roots came nigh to thrippin' him off his feet; an' once he saw a little red cap under a fern, an' heard the quare laughin', but on he went, not heedin'.

Afther a time it was in his mind that the trees o' this forest grew in straight rows, as they had been an army o' men standin'; but just then Etáin turned an' beckoned him to come beside o' her. An' Dermond was not slow in doin' that.

"Are ye wise in thought an' speech?" asked she.

"No more nor other men," says Dermond.

"'Tis well ye're willin' to own it, then. Are ye stout o' heart?"

"'Tis not well for a man to be boastin', as I found to me sorrow, but ready am I to serve ye with two sstrong arms."

"Why would ye serve me?" asked Etáin.

“For bein’ the fairest maid in the land. An’ I would ye were a right king’s daughter,” says Dermond.

“An’ if I were?” asked she.

“Then would I win ye fairly.”

“An’ bein’ none?” says she; an’ as she spoke her eyes met Dermond’s, an’ a sudden fire leapt up in his heart.

“Then will I make ye one, if there’s kingdoms to be won by the sthrong arm!”

With that Etáin smiled, well pleased with his manner o’ speech; an’ she says—

“If ye speak as fair as that to Dughall, then will ye have small need o’ me wisdom. But should need come it shall all be for yer helpin’, Dermond, son o’ Cormac. An’ now, here is me father’s house, an’ I bid ye welcome.”

Sure enough, there before them was a long, low buildin’, woven mainly o’ the rushes. But round it was no sign o’ servin’ man or maid at all. The door stood wide open, an’ Etáin bent her sweet head an’ stepped inside, an’ Dermond went afther.

In a great chair by the far end o’ the hall sat Dughall the Wise. His hair was white, an’

his long beard rested on his knees; but his eyes saw far, an' as Dermond came nigh he rose, waitin' on Etáin, to see what she would be afther sayin'.

“ ‘Tis Dermond o' the Bow, son o' Cormac the King,” says she, “come to hire for seedin’ an’ harvestin’.”

Now Dermond would have said nay to that, for he'd no mind for such labourin’; but her eyes were fair on him, an' he'd no will o' his own to do other than her pleasure.

“Ay, that am I,” says Dermond.

Then Dughall looked at him well, an' says he—

“Many a rash man has spoken as ye speak, an' has tried to do what ye may fail in; an' no man has yet sowed that seed or gathered in that harvest, else would there be a rich kingdom where is naught but wilderness.”

“An’ how may that be?”

“From over pride in wisdom,” says Dughall, most bitterly, “in the day when Oisin, son o' Lua, came to this place, an' would match his craft with mine. An' not bein' content with the life that was mine, I made wager that I was

sstronger. An' he overthrew me, an' laid a spell on all that was mine. An' naught could lift it till I held in me hand a grain o' ripe corn, that had been grown on the mountain-top yonder. Such o' me men as were willin' to try the sowin' an' harvestin' were spared me for a time, but the others he turned to trees. An' as each one failed in the task, he became a tree. Scarce any could reach the slope, for Oisin angered the Little People against me, an' placed them as guards round the base o' the mountain, where none might pass their land in safety. Bran, alone, that was chief huntsman, made his way to the top, but there was no right foothold, an' before the seed was planted he fell, an' was never seen more. An' well may men call me Dughall the Wise, for I have shown great wisdom, an' lost the lives o' sstrong men."

Well, now, Dermond thought an' thought, rememberin' the sly laughin' o' the Little People. Yet it seemed to him that there should be some way for him to contrive success. So says he—

“An' where is this mountain?”

Dughall brought him to the door, an' pointed out where it rose toward the sky; an' 'twas a

terrible steep place, all crags an' towerin' precipices, an' nigh on out o' reach o' mortal man, had there been no Little People guardin' it at all.

Then a thought came to Dermond, an' he turned to the old man.

"An' what for soldiers had ye? Were they sthrong in sword fightin', or were they betther at bendin' the bow?"

"Betther with the sword, Dermond son o' Cormac. No bowmen had I barrin' ten; all whom were feared o' the Little People an' became trees."

"Ay," says Dermond. "Well, 'tis ill thinkin' o' grave matthers when one goes hungerin'. Have ye a bite o' food handy like, seein' that 'tis many hours I've been fastin'?"

Etáin laughed at his plight, an' brought him what was to be had—roast meat, an' cakes, an' mead in a great horn; an' when he had eaten an' drunk the last crumb an' dhrop, so that her eyes were wide with wondherin' at his appetite, he went out again an' looked at the top o' the mountain, while Dughall the Wise went back to his seat, expectin' little.

But Etáin stayed near Dermond, an' together they went nigh to the foot o' the mountain, but not on the land o' the Little People. There Dermond measured with his eye, an' saw that the place closest the mountain-top was a juttin' cliff on the side o' the neighbourin' peak.

"Have ye a fine cord?" he asked of Etáin.

"How long?" says she.

"To reach from the cliff side to the mountain-top."

"Nay," says she, "but I have that which will serve to make one." An' with that she let down her hair, an' it fell all round her like fair golden silk, reachin' her sandals o' fine deer-skin. An' she caught the little small knife from the belt o' Dermond an' cut through a great handful of it. Then Dermond took the knife an' did the same with his own hair, cuttin' it where 'twas longest. An' together they twisted it into a fine, long cord o' black an' gold colour.

"Now bring me the seed to be sowed," says he; an' this time 'twas Etáin sprang to do his biddin'. So he drew a straight arrow from the sheaf at his side, an' bound seven grains o' corn

to it, all tied in a leaf with the end o' the cord. Then he rolled up the rest of it, an' started over to scale the cliff side, Etáin followin' him. At last he made his way up the cliff, to where was a little small shelf o' rock, an' there he unrolled the ball o' cord an' steadied himself to shoot.

Then, seein' what he would be tryin', Etáin called out to him—

“First try the shot with another arrow, for fear o' missin'.”

“That is right wisdom,” says Dermond; an' he did that same, an' 'twas well he did, for the wind whirled it past the mountain-top, an' it broke on a rock below. But when he had shot twice more, he had the way o' the wind, an' could allow for it. An' the fourth arrow was the one with the corn tied to it. Dermond aimed it strhong an' steady, an' sure enough it struck deep into the ground on the mountain-top, carryin' the cord with it; but the other end o' that same was fast tied to the belt o' Dermond.

An' lookin' down he could see the face of Etáin, an' her eyes were bright with gladness. Aah, 'twas not long before he was at her side,

leavin' the cord end with a heavy stone on it to hold it there.

"How will ye gather the grain?" says she; yet half knowin' how 'twould be.

"By the cord that holds the arrow," says Dermond.

"An' if the birds fly down an' tear up the young plants?"

"That they shall not," says Dermond. So he made many arrows o' straight branches, an' some o' reeds. An' he planted seven other grains in the valley below. An' when the time was comin' that the sprouts would be comin' out o' the earth, he took his arrows up the cliff side, an' set himself to watchin'.

An' whenever a bird flew near the mountain-top, Dermond's arrow shot straight an' true, an' that bird came no more away from there. Ay, but 'twas weary stayin' there, for as he saw the green growin' higher an' higher, he dared not so much as think o' leavin' the cliff side, for fear o' disaster. If ye'll believe it, 'twas nigh on three months that he spent on that shelf, havin' no mind to be turned into oak or fir tree. But one there was who would not

leave him in danger o' starvin', an' Etáin was that same.

At last the grain ripened in the valley, an' by that Dermond knew that his time o' triumphin' was comin'. He called Dughall from his hall, an' ye could have heard his voice ringin' out for a mile.

An' then he lifted the cord an' began to pull. Now 'twas hard gettin' the plants loose, for the roots had sthrudd deep into the earth; an' all round him he seemed to be hearin' the Little People jeerin' at him an' waitin' for the rope to break. An' for a moment his strength was naught.

Then he called down to the one who stood nearest—

“Mouth o' roses, are ye there?”

“Ay,” says Etáin.

“Then laugh! Laugh yer sweetest, or I'll fail an' come to ill yet.”

An' up rose her laughter like bells o' gold, an' the music o' that put the strength o' seven into the arms o' Dermond—for no more could he hear the tauntin' o' the Little People.

He gave one more steady pull, an' down flew

the stalks o' ripe corn, roots an' leaves an' all,
at the feet o' Dughall the Wise, an' he caught
them up an' held the grain safe in his hand!

[“And what happened then?”

“Why, sure, all the trees turned back
into the armed men o' Dughall, an' his low
house into a fine royal palace for them all,
an’—an’—”

“And they lived happy ever after?”

“Ever afther. An’ all because Etáin
laughed sweeter nor the Little People.
There’s a mighty power in a laugh.”

“And if she hadn’t, wouldn’t there have
been any story?”

“No, naught but one more tall tree in
the forest o’ Dughall. An’ now away with
yees, before ye have me laughin’ in spite
o’ meself.”]

III

EIVEEN COLD-HEART

[“Now why an’ ever should I be wastin’ me good time chatterin’ to yees? Sure, ‘tis coaxin’ the very pipe out o’ me mouth ye’ll be, next, with the soft talk o’ yees. Listen now.”]

YE mind what I told yees about the sons o’ Cormac? How they all tried their fortune, wantin’ to marry King Murdough’s daughter an’ take the labour o’ rulin’ his kingdom off his shouldhers? An’ how Dermond, that was oldest, was beaten by fat Eocha the cook; an’ Eiveen, that came next, was tripped up by Kevin the groom—an’ all because they were shamed o’ wearin’ Cormac’s old jerkin? An’ ye’ll mind how Dermond went off an’ found fortune beyant the Path o’ the Rocks? Well,

then, 'tis Eiveen the Swift as I'll be afther tellin' about.

When the gate o' the castle shut behind him an' Maive the Fair, that had brought him the purse o' money from Princess Maurya, an' had followed him out o' the door, all the wits o' him couldn't tell him what way 'twas best to turn. He looked at Maive, thinkin' to open the door for her again, but she shook her head, holdin' fast to his hand all the while.

"Come, then," says Eiveen. "'Tis scant use our standin' here an' waitin' for the sun to start our shadows on the road." So he dropped the purse inside his huntin' bag, an' led the way down the path that went by the river bank; an' by him, in her cloak o' white wool that was fastened with a gold clasp, went Maive the Fair.

Now all that mornin' they met no one on the road, nor passed any house at all; an' never a word more did Eiveen say to Maive, for there were sore thoughts within him, o' Kevin the groom, an' o' the laughter in King Murdough's castle. At last it came to be the middle o' the day, an' he saw that Maive was walkin' slow

behind him, bein' weary; so he sat down under a tree by the roadside, an' took out some cakes from his huntin' bag.

An' as they were eatin', Eiveen looked at Maive. An' she was but a slip of a girleen, with brown eyes that saw straight into the heart o' him.

"Why did ye come with me?" asked Eiveen.
" 'Tis a hard road I must thavel, with the spite o' the Little People on me for me folly."

"For to take half o' the burden o' that from ye," says Maive. "Maybe they'll not be angry that long, if ye do naught else to turn them against ye."

"That may be a thtrue word," says Eiveen, "but 'tis yer own choice to come, an' not mine to bring ye. Fortune an' power is what I'm searchin' for, an' naught else."

"Then 'twas not lovin' Princess Maurya ye were?" asked Maive.

"Not I," says Eiveen. " 'Twas to rule the kingdom I came."

Now quare it was that afther hearin' him say those words, Maive was no longer weary. She ran to the river side an' brought him cool

wather for dhrinkin' in her little golden cup; an' gave him the small sharp knife from her girdle, because that he had none o' his own; an' last of all she took the huntin' bag off the grass, where 'twas lyin', an' hung it round her neck. Then she nodded to him that 'twas time to be goin' on their road.

"An' 'tis careful we'll be not to vex the Little People," says she.

Now they hadn't gone but a bit o' the road when they met along with a quare, crooked little man, that was dhrivin' a crooked, quare small cow.

"Stand out, an' let me have the road for me cow," says he, in a thin, shakin' voice.

"Ye've yer share," answered Eiveen. "What's yer cow to me?" But Maive dhrew him by to the grass, an' waved her hand to the quare man to be afther passin' on.

"Far betther for ye to turn back with me, Maive the Fair," says the little man. "'Tis long wantin' in happiness ye'll be with Eiveen Cold-Heart."

"Ay," laughed Maive, "but 'tis not me own happiness that I'm hopin' to find."

“An’ why are ye callin’ me Eiveen Cold-Heart, when ’tis Eiveen the Swift is me name?” asked Eiveen, angered.

“Look in that same heart, an’ find yer answer,” says the man; an’ before they knew what had happened, sure, he was gone like the whiff o’ smoke from a pipe.

“ ‘Twas one o’ the Little People,” says Maive. “ ‘Tis well to speak them fair, if more should be on the road.”

“Ay, there’s truth in that,” says Eiveen. An’ so they went on their way, Maive singin’ to him to cheer the goin’.

Now ’twas drawin’ toward night when they came in sight of a small child sittin’ in the road, where ’twas narrow, between two high banks.

“Make room for us to pass,” says Eiveen, for he was wantin’ to reach some restin’ place for the night.

“First help me out o’ this,” says the child, wailin’. “ ‘Tis me foot is caught in the crack o’ the stones.”

“Get it out yerself, an’ out o’ me way,” says Eiveen. But Maive knelt down an’ pulled the

rough stones away with her soft white hands, an' the child stood up.

"Far wiser were ye to turn yer steps an' follow me, Maive the Fair," says he. "'Tis but little love ye'll win from Eiveen Cold-Heart."

Maive looked back along the road, but she shook her head bravely, not sayin' a word. 'Twas Eiveen was fierce at that.

"Why are ye callin' me out o' me name?" says he. "'Tis Eiveen the Swift ye'll be findin' me!" An' he started to catch the child. But there, before he'd stepped fair out o' his tracks, he could see no child nowhere.

"'Tis the Little People are vexed when ye speak sharp," says Maive.

"I'd forgot that," says Eiveen. "Next time I'll have care o' me words."

Now it grew fast darker as they walked on in the narrow path, an' the night birds were callin' in the trees. By-an'-by they came to a wider place, near the river, where willows grew; an' under the boughs was a light shinin', faint an' waverin'.

“ ‘Tis a cabin there,” says Maive. “We may get fire to warm us.”

“Ay, an’ food to eat, for I’ve no more o’ that but one crust,” says Eiveen. An’ as they came nearer they saw an old, withered-lookin’ crone crouchin’ by the door-stone. Eiveen spoke up to her—

“Is it fire on the hearth ye have? The night grows chill.”

“Ay,” says she, “there’s fire for warmin’ Maive the Fair, but the flame would die if ye entered me cabin, Eiveen Cold-Heart.”

At this he turned on his heel, angry; but Maive dhrew him to sit on the grass, an’ heaped up dhry sticks, an’ slipped by the old woman into the door, an’ brought out a lighted turf to make a bit o’ fire on the ground. Then Eiveen took out the crust, an’ gave part to Maive.

“ ‘Tis starved I am,” says the old crone. “Have ye no bite to spare for me?”

“Nay,” says Eiveen, glad to spite her for misnamin’ o’ him; but Maive broke her bit in two, an’ gave half to the woman. Then she brought wather from the river in her cup. An’

as she was comin' back over the grass, the crone said—

“Far safer were ye to stay in me cabin with me, Maive the Fair, than to be wearin' the sandals from yer little white feet followin' Eiveen Cold-Heart.”

“Nay,” laughed Maive. “ ’Tis naught but his own word shall part me from him while there’s service I can do to help him to his heart’s wish.”

“If it’s that ye’re waitin’ for,” says Eiveen, “go yer way where ye will. I’ll reach fortune sooner without ye.”

As he spoke those hard words, the old crone stood up an’ pointed her staff at Maive, but her eyes were on Eiveen.

“Go, then,” says she. “Find yer fortune as ye will, an’ see naught o’ Maive but the want o’ her an’ the shadow o’ her, till ye’ve warmed that cold heart ye carry.”

An’ as Eiveen sprang up from the log where he’d been sittin’, sure, in place o’ Maive in her white cloak was nothin’ but a slendher, young, white birch tree; an’ nowhere was cabin, nor crone, nor so much as a spark o’ fire burnin’

at all. 'Twas all alone he was under the willows, an' no sound but the splashin' o' the runnin' river over the stones in the darkness o' the night.

Well, he pushed his way here an' there through the trees, lookin' for Maive, but nowhere could he spy a glint o' the white cloak; an' at last, bein' too weary to go farther, he lay down on the turf and slept. All through the night he dreamed o' tryin' to reach a white birch tree. 'Twas always growin' far ahead, up a steep hillside, an' he could never come nigh it.

When first he woke in the mornin', he felt a sharp wind blowin' from the north across him, an' yet he wasn't cold, for over him seemed to be lyin' Maive's cloak o' soft wool. But when he rose, it was nowhere around.

"Small use in stayin' here," thought Eiveen; so afther givin' one more look among the trees in search o' Maive, he turned to the path by the river, an' went his way.

'Twas lonesome walkin', that. All the time he felt somethin' lackin', an' not knowin' what it was. By an' beyant, as noon was near, he

came to an inn by the road, an' asked in it for food.

"Have ye money to pay for it?" asked the man.

Then of a sudden Eiveen minded that his purse o' money was in the huntin' bag over Maive's shouldhers. He set off, runnin' back by the way he'd come, an' when 'twas nigh dusk he came to the willows. An' there was the dark cabin, an' the crone crouchin' on the door-stone, an' by her a slim, white girleen.

"Maive!" he called, forgettin' the ill words he'd given her. "Are ye not comin' with me?" But she stepped back from him, an' the crone laughed.

"'Tis for the bag ye came, an' not for Maive the Fair. Ask her for it, an' begone!"

Eiveen hastened towards Maive, an' right then a mist blew over his eyes, an' there was naught but the birch tree an' the huntin' bag on the grass by it. He slung it over his arm, an' went off again. Too late it was for him to be afther reachin' the inn, so he had to sleep on the road. An' again he thought the cloak

covered him from the night dews an' the cold.
But wakin', it was gone.

At the inn he bought bread and meat, an' as he sat eatin' he couldn't put by the thought o' Maive sharin' her dhry crust with the crone. An' he was full o' wrath at the Little People for takin' her from him. Presently by came ridin' a troop o' men in armour, all shinin'; an' their leader stopped an' spoke to Eiveen.

"What man's man are ye?"

"No man's man," says Eiveen, "but a king's son."

"What king is that?"

"Cormac without a Kingdom. His second son am I, named Eiveen the Swift."

"Then mount an' ride with me, an' it may be we'll find fightin' a plenty, an' win great honour. Cathal o' the Mountain am I, an' a good comrade is me heart's desire."

So Eiveen rode off to the north with Cathal, on a horse that was given him. But all through the day he was hearkenin' for the music o' Maive's singin', an' the road was long an' weary wantin' it. At last, far in the afthernoon, Eiveen turned to Cathal.

“ ‘Tis somethin’ I’ve left behind that I miss sorely,” says he. “I must ride back an’ claim it.”

“Go, then,” says Cathal, “an’ join us where we halt for the night, a bow-shot farther up this road, by the runnin’ brook.”

Eiveen rode off swiftly across the wild counthry toward the river, an’ again at dusk he came on the cabin. An’ Maive, standin’ among the shadows, faded as he neared her.

“Give me Maive, or ‘twill go ill with ye!” he cried in anger to the old crone.

“Nay, Eiveen Cold-Heart, not yet warmed. ‘Tis but wrath at losin’ what ye thought was yer own that brought ye back. Go, seek yer road to fortune!”

An’ then the mist clouded all from his eyes, an’ naught remained for him but just to ride back to Cathal.

Next mornin’ they all rode on to the north. An’ all day Eiveen kept seein’ the brown eyes o’ Maive in every shadow. When they passed the apple-trees the flowers were like her white hands, an’ the whish o’ the wind was like her steps in the grass.

Late in the day he turned to Cathal, an' says he—

"I must go back for somethin'. 'Tis ill fortune that I left it."

"Nay," says Cathal, likin' it little. "If ye go from us again, ye need not come back."

"Then will I seek honour elsewhere," says Eiveen. He sprang from the horse, an' tossed the bridle to Cathal.

"Take back yer gift," says he. "'Tis afther seekin' me treasure I'll be, an' not givin' over till I find it."

So off he went, across hill an' valley, toward the far river. An' though 'twas Eiveen the Swift he was, the night was gone an' early dawn breakin' before he reached the willows again. Through the trees he saw the cabin, an' the old woman, but Maive was not there.

"Maive!" he called. An' "Maive!"

"Why have ye come?" asked the crone. "Are ye seekin' a servant for carryin' yer bag?"

"Nay," says Eiveen. "'Tis I would serve her."

"Then bring wather from the river to the

birch tree, for 'tis droopin' for wantin' that same."

Then Eiveen took his huntin' bag an' filled it with wather, an' poured it on the roots. An' for three days he went back an' forth, thinkin' o' naught but how to keep the slender white birch tree from fadin' away.

An' on the third day, as he saw how it was witherin', he knelt down at his roots, sorrowin'.

"What would ye if ye had but one wish to be granted?" asked the old crone, pityin' him.

"Maive," says Eiveen.

"An' not fortune an' power?"

"Nay, 'twas happier I was in Cormac's cabin with neither," says Eiveen. An' as he spoke, 'twas two hot tears dropped on the roots o' the little tree.

Then 'twas as if mist rolled away, an' the sun shone down on him in gladness, for there by him stood Maive, with her brown eyes lookin' laughin' into his warm heart.

An' together they went back across the hills to the Lough o' the Eagle, knowin' that the Little People were no more vexed.

IV

THE QUESTIN' O' CLEENA

[“A truce to fightin’, now. Not one word comes out o’ me mouth till ye’re as whist as lambs hearkenin’ for the grass to grow. Ay, see now, how aisy it comes!”]

MEN were sthrong men in those days, but never one at the court o’ King Murdough had come nigh matchin’ Feargus the Black, till the sons o’ Cormac set foot there. Many a time he thought how ’twas the green jerkin an’ the power o’ the Little People backin’ that same that had lost him the fight; though he’d wit enough to hold his tongue, an’ not risk the angerin’ o’ King Murdough. But ’twas ever in his mind that some day he’d prove himself as good a man as Conan o’ the Long Arms.

Now there came a day when King Murdough had a message in hand for Torcall the Dane,

that dwelt nigh the shores o' Moyle. An' 'twas a sharp word was to be sent, an' full o' peril to him that carried it.

The King sat on his high seat, when all was ready, an' looked round the hall, where stood many to do his biddin'. An' in a far corner, by the wide fireplace, Feargus the Black was talkin' with Cleena, his daughter.

Then says King Murdough, in a quiet small voice, as he'd been talking to himself—

“Is there a man can carry me word to Torcall the Dane, an' bring me his thtrue answer without failin'?”

Half o' those in the hall paid no heed at all, but Cleena caught the hand o' Feargus.

“ ‘Tis yer chance,” she whispered. “Go forward an' claim the right.”

So like a flash Feargus pushed through the crowd an' knelt to King Murdough; though many were drawin' back, seein' that Torcall was no child to be reckoned with.

“What would ye have?” asked the King.

“Leave to carry the word to the shores o' Moyle,” answered Feargus.

Murdough shook his head, for 'twas not in

his heart to lose a good warrior like Feargus to the Danes, when a lesser would do as well.

"Such work is not for ye," he says. "Wait, for the hour o' battle will come afther."

"Give me leave to go, King Murdough," says Feargus again.

"Nay," says King Murdough, "for there's many a chance that who goes will not return."

Then Conan spoke, that had been sittin' by the King—

"'Tis right he has. Give him leave for seven days an' seven, to go to the shores o' Moyle an' to return; an' if he comes again in safety, at me side shall he fight the men o' Torcall."

Feargus looked at Conan, that was wed to Princess Maurya, an' for the first time a flash o' friendship was in the meetin' o' their eyes.

"Come back will I, Conan o' the Kingdom. In seven days an' seven more I'll claim that word from ye."

With that Conan loosed the huntin' horn from his belt, an' gave it to Feargus.

"'Tis a token o' the word I've given ye," says he. "Return it in the time set, an' lead the battle with me. An' carryin' it ye'll be safe

from the Little People, but use it only in yer sorest need."

So before night fell, Feargus the Black was ridin' away to the sea, an' none with him but Kevin the groom. An' Cleena stood on the castle wall, with her black hair hangin' round her, an' watched him go.

Each day, when it neared sunset, she went up in the tower, lookin' for him; an' it came to be seven days an' three more, then seven days an' four more, an' no word o' Feargus.

Now the next day to that was a great huntin', an' Conan an' Princess Maurya rode out at the head o' the court, all dressed in gay colours. But Cleena watched from the tower, an' King Murdough slept.

When the sun was turnin' to the west, an' all noise o' the huntin was far an' away, she saw a man runnin' along the path by the river. An' as he neared the ford, she saw 'twas Kevin the groom. Like a hawk from the clouds she was at the gate before any other could reach it.

"Where left ye Feargus?" she cried; an' Kevin the groom crouched down on the stones, fearin' the great dark eyes o' her that were

lookin' through an' through him, an' callin him
coward for leavin' his masther.

“ ‘Tis not for me to say,’ ” he whispered, nigh
on spent with the runnin’. “ When we were
passin’ the head o’ the valley o’ the Dark
Lough, he dropped the horn o’ Conan; an’ when
he turned back to search for it, for ‘twas his
token from the prince, I lost sight o’ him, an’
could find naught o’ him, though I called many
times over.”

“ An’ yer horses?” ” asked Cleena.

“ When I came back to where I had tied them,
they were gone, an’ no trace to be seen. ‘Tis
the Little People have stolen them all away.
Ay, that it is.”

Then Cleena turned to those in the courtyard,
an’ there were not many, for all the fightin’
men were off at the huntin’, an’ says she—

“ Who dares go back to the Valley o’ the Dark
Lough to find Feargus?” ”

But none answered. An’ as for Kevin the
groom, he slipped away, for fear o’ bein’ made
to show the way.

“ Is there not one man among ye to be friend
to Feargus?” ” asked Cleena, lookin’ from one to

the other, an' waitin' for who should step forward. But a hard man an' a proud was Fear-gus, an' now, in his need, none dared brave the Little People to aid him.

Then came scorn to the eyes o' Cleena, an' she turned an' passed them, holdin' her cloak to her that it might not touch them.

“All this shall King Murdough hear when he wakes; an’ Princess Maurya, when she comes from the huntin’; and Conan o’ the Kingdom shall reckon with ye. But for me, I go alone to seek Fear-gus the Black, where ye dare not follow.”

With that she went into the stable, an’ there lay Cian, the waitin’ boy, sound sleepin’. As she brushed by him, he woke an’ sprang up.

“What would Lady Cleena?” he asked.

“A horse, that I may ride to seek for Fear-gus, who is lost by the Dark Lough.”

“Is there no man to go?” asked Cian.

“Nay,” says she, “none but children tremblin’ for fear o’ the Little People.”

“Then will I ride with ye,” cried Cian.
“Though I have but a boy’s strength in fightin’,

yet was me mother a wise woman, an' taught me many a cunnin' charm."

So Cian brought out two horses, an' together they rode out o' the gate an' across the ford, Cleena never lookin' back to the castle. All through the night they rode, pressin' on with naught but the noise o' the ripplin' water for guidin'; an' in the mornin' there still lay many a mile before them. Yet they never dhrew rein, for 'twas the sixth day afther the seventh, an' there was mountains to pass.

As the sun went down the west, they saw a deep valley before them, an' in it a lough, with a bit of an island in it; an' the wather was as smooth an' dark as black marble.

Cleena slipped from her horse, an' Cian the same, an' together they tied the horses to a tree, Cian twistin' the bridles in a strange knot, that the Little People should have no power for untyin' them.

"Where now, Lady Cleena?" say Cian.

"Down yon glen, to seek Feargus," says she.

"An' I with ye," says Cian.

"Nay," answered Cleena. "I bid ye wait

here, that there shall be one to tell all to Princess Maurya if I come not back by mornin'."

"Then hearken to me," says Cian. "Trust naught in man's shape till he pass through fire an' wather; an' touch the hand o' none ye meet, be it Feargus himself."

So Cleena caught her cloak o' gold an' scarlet over her arm, an' went from him, in the light o' sunset. An' soon she came to a place where the trees grew closer, an' there was scant room for her to pass under their boughs. But as she bent, she saw a glint o' gold in a heap o' dead leaves, an' there lay the huntin' horn o' Conan.

'Twas quick up in her hand, with its cord passed round her white neck; an' the courage o' ten came into her heart. Down the valley she passed, lookin' every way for a sight o' Feargus, an' callin' his name now an' again; but none answered.

'Twas mortal dark down at the wather's edge, an' what way to turn was more nor she knew.

" 'Tis sore needin' help I am," says she; an' with that she blew a soft note on the horn. It echoed all down the lough, like the tremblin' of a bell, an' before it had fair died away, she saw

on the sand a little boat o' skins, like the fishers use, with a paddle swingin' in the wather. Cleena waited for no thinkin' but stepped in an' paddled toward the island.

There was no sign o' life on it, but she tied the boat to a bush that hung over low, with that same knot o' Cian's. Then from the fold o' her girdle she took flint an' steel that he'd given her, an' made a bit o' fire to light a dhry branch that lay handy. With that torch she went on, an' soon found the island cut in two by a narrow ditch o' wather. Howsomever, she leaped over it, an' again called Feargus.

There was a rustlin' in the leaves, an' a voice answerin'—

“Cleena! Daughter!”

“Father! Come!” she cried again; an' the light from the torch fell on the very face o' Feargus. She was just goin' to run to him, when sudden she thought what Cian had said, an' she slipped back past the ditch, holdin' the torch to light him. He came to the edge, reachin' out his hand.

“Help me to cross. ‘Tis mortal weary I am,” says he.

"Nay," says Cleena, "come ye over." But with that word he was naught but dhriven mist.

"'Twas his shadow," thought Cleena; an' turnin', she went the other way, still callin' on Feargus. By an' beyant she heard a branch breakin', an' again a dark figure answered her callin'; an' again 'twas the likeness o' Feargus.

Now here was no wather to cross; so quick, to try was it a thtrue man, she held down her torch an' set fire to some withered leaves.

"Come to me by that," says she.

"Give me yer hand first," says the other, movin' near.

"Nay," says Cleena; an' 'twas as if smoke blew away an' left no man behind. Just then she heard a sound at her feet; an' there, lyin' in the grass, was Feargus, again, bound hand an' foot.

"Loose me, if it be Cleena, an' not the banshee," he groaned.

"Wait," says Cleena, runnin' back to the lough's edge, an' dippin' the scarf from her neck in the wather. 'Twas with fire an' wather she returned to Feargus, an' with the burnin' end o' her brand she parted the cords that

bound him. Seein' that he never flinched at the fire, she quenched the sparks on his coat with the wet scarf. Still Feargus was before her, an' she began to believe it himself.

"Rise an' follow," says she; an' he obeyed, seemin' half sleepin'. She led the way to the boat, not lookin' back till she was in it; an' then, when she turned, in the gloom stood three Fearguses, each bendin' forward to enter the boat, an' naught to show which was her father. A sore tremblin' came over her; an' then she raised the horn an' blew a brave blast.

Smoke cleared away overhead, an' mist drifted across the wather, but the threue Feargus stepped into the end o' the boat, an' sat quiet while she paddled back to the shore. Sort o' dazed he was still, as he followed her up the glen to where Cian was waitin' with their horses, but not until he was fair in the moonlight outside did he come to his right senses.

" 'Tis yerself, Cleena!" says he.

"Ay," says she. "A far road have I come to find ye, father."

"An' 'tis love I'll be owin' ye all me days for

that same," says he. "Where is Kevin the groom, an' me horses?"

" 'Tis Kevin is not worth the words ye're wastin' on him," says she. "An' as for the horses, 'tis himself says that the Little People had taken them while he was seekin' ye. Take ye mine, an' save yer honour with Prince Conan, an' I'll ride slow with Cian."

"Nay," says the lad. "Try first the power o' the huntin' horn."

Cleena took it from her neck an' held it out to Feargus. An' at the blast he blew, out o' the forest came the horses that had been lost by Kevin.

"Lose no time," called Cian. " 'Tis nigh on mornin', an' this seven days afther the seventh."

"Then haste's our word," says Feargus.

An' quick into the saddles they sprung; an' swift they rode across the hills to the road up the river. 'Twas a long weary ride was before them, but on they pushed, waitin' for neither rest nor food; an' as the sun neared the trees to the west, they rode to the ford.

An' there stood Conan o' the Kingdom, with

Princess Maurya by him. Sure, Feargus sprang down an' held out the horn. An' says he—

“Torcall refuses tribute, Prince Conan; but 'tis as yer friend I'll fight at yer side in the battle where we overcome him. For if the Little People helped ye at yer need, sure, 'tis meself would never be here but for the aidin' of a slip of a girl an' a bit of a lad.”

So they clasped hands like strhong men; an' from the warriors o' King Murdough came a great shout; an' into the castle they went with high honour.

[“But Kevin the groom?”

“Sure, he slipped out o' the tale entirely, for very shame; an' that's why I never knew the bad end he came to.”]

V.

ETHLENN O' THE MIST

[“Give me half a quarther of a minute for thinkin’, now; an’ hear the rale old tale I’ll be afther tellin’ yees, o’ years long gone an’ far away.”]

IN the days when King Murdough held power far an’ wide, the River o’ White Rapids flowed from the far hills an’ plunged down the cliffs into the Sea o’ Moyle. ’Twas naught but a dot-teen of a sthream where it started, as it might ha’ dhropped out o’ the rain clouds; but afther it reached the deep glen in the forest, it ran dark an’ swift, an’ was ill to pass over, barrin’ ’twas at Ath nan Ciar.

The meanin’ o’ that same was the Ford o’ the Shadow; an’ ’twas a braver hunter nor most that would near it afther sundown, for dread o’

meetin' Ethlenn o' the Mist. So it happened that few had seen the grey roof o' her dwellin', bein' content with the tales told of it. Yet was there that in the tales which made many a man dhream o' passin' the ford an' winnin' her.

Now 'twas late in the year, an' beginnin' to be cool at dusk, when a man on a black horse came ridin' up the long hill slopes an' through the low bushes toward Ath nan Ciar; an' no fearin' was in his heart. 'Twas a windless night, an' sound o' his comin' carried far; even to where Ethlenn sat in her hall with her three maids, before a pile o' burnin' logs.

One was spinnin' threads o' silver like moonlight on wather; an' one was standin' weavin' in a loom; an' the third, that was kneelin' in the firelight, was playin' on a golden harp the song o' the sea waves breakin' on the shelvin' sand. But Ethlenn sat lookin' into the leapin' flames.

An' says the one that was spinnin'—

“A sthrong lad was he that came in the dawn,
but where is he now?”

Then the girl that wove in the loom answered—

“He sits by the ford, with a cold wound in his

arm. An' 'twill be a lesson to him to hold his hands from Ethlenn o' the Mist."

But Ethlenn said naught.

Then spoke again the maid who was spinnin'—

"An' sure, 'twas a stout soldier that waded the ford at the noon, but where is he now?"

The girl that knelt playin' sad on the harp answered her—

"He lies by the River o' White Rapids, with the cold above his heart; an' never again will he think to grasp Ethlenn o' the Mist an' force her to follow him. Like clear glass in runnin' wather she was gone from his sight; an' the chill touch is with him in rememberin'."

An' Ethlenn laid her little white hand—like a blossom it was—on a knife that hung in her girdle, gleamin' like clear crystal. At last she spoke—lookin' in the deep o' the fire.

" 'Tis the sound o' horse's feet beyant the ford I'm hearin'."

The spinner rested her distaff an' hearkened.

"Nay," says she; "'tis but the beatin' o' the surf at the foot o' the cliff."

"An' I hear the voice of a man urgin' his horse to the ford."

The weaver leaned her head back an' was still, while the fire-sparks flew up.

"'Tis naught but the moanin' o' the night owls, Lady Ethlenn," says she, an' turned to her loom.

"An' sure, 'tis the clankin' of armour is in me ears, an' one stands by the door waitin' to knock!" called out Ethlenn.

"Who dares?" cried the harp player, strrikin' a wild note; an' all sprang to their feet as they heard a sudden rappin' without.

None moved, but in another breath the door was flung wide, an' on the threshold stood a tall, strong soldier. The light from within shone on his armour, all made o' linked silver rings; an' his face was that o' one well used to commandin'. He looked for a time at Ethlenn, wonderin' no more at the tales told o' her beauty.

She glanced at him, careless like, an' turned back to her seat by the hearth—her pale brown hair fallin' wavin' round her from the circlet o' gold on her head like the cloud above a wather-fall; an' the long lashes drooped over her dark

eyes—as she had no thought o' the sstranger in her hall.

An' the spinner sent her distaff twirlin' on; an' on flew the shinin' shuttle through the web in the loom; but the third—an' Deòin was her name—let her harp fall clangin' to the floor as she faced him.

“Yer will?” says she, comin' forward.

“ ‘Tis by no will o' mine I come, but for car-ryin' a word from King Murdough, over-lord on the shores o' Moyle,” answered the warrior.

“Is he over-lord o' the mist an' the shadow?” asked the one weavin', standin' slendher an' proud at the loom.

“Nay; an' for that am I come to Lady Eth-lenn to ask o' her what none other can grant.”

At that Ethlenn turned her head an' signed him to a bench before her.

“Yer name?” she asked.

“Cathal o' the Mountain,” answered the man, seatin' himself. An' a chill feelin' went through the sstrong heart o' him, when he reached out his hands to warm them, an' found no more heat in the flames than if they'd been rays o' moon-light. But Ethlenn laughed.

“An’ what will King Murdough of Ethlenn?”

“ ‘Tis yer power for aidin’ Conan o’ the Kingdom he asks,” says Cathal, settin’ his mind not to fear her. “Many days ago he sent to Torcall the Dane, demandin’ the tribute due. An’ Torcall, seein’ in his harbour the long ships o’ Sitric Silverbeard, his brother, laughed in scornin’ o’ Murdough; an’ Feargus the Black, who rode with the message, could ill win back to the King. So there was much talkin’ o’ war through the land, an’ many men o’ stout heart gathered round the castle o’ Murdough. ’Twas thirty an’ more that rode with me; an’ many more with other chiefs. An’ with Conan to lead, we took the road o’ the river to the sea.

“Now Feargus, that before had been enemy to Prince Conan, fought beside him as by a brother; an’ each made a vow to stand by the other in war an’ in time o’ peace, swearin’ before the crossed staff an’ serpent. Then Kevin the groom, that Feargus had beaten for mistreatin’ his horse, slipped off an’ told all to Torcall, within the town. Ill be to him for that same, for by night came the Danes, an’ took Feargus sleepin’, an’ carried him on a boat, an’

so to the *Long Wave*, where Sitric has him in keepin', threatenin' to put knife to his heart if Conan tries rescue, or does harm to the town o' Torecall."

"But why come to me?" asked Ethlenn.

"For this. All men know the power of Ethlenn over mist an' shadow; an' would ye come with me to the shore, an' ddraw down clouds to hide the sea, we might reach the ships an' bring Feargus safe out o' their hands. 'Tis no aid in fightin' we're askin', but the chance for fair battlin' with the Danes."

Ethlenn rose to her feet, an' in her eyes was the comin' storm. Her dress, that had been white as foam undher the moon, now showed grey as wreaths o' fog creepin' up on the sand, an' her dagger seemed a sharp icicle.

"Met ye any on yer way?" she asked.

"Ay," answered Cathal. "Two from the court o' Murdough, that started on this same errand to ye, but fell by the way. Wherefore had I more need to press on."

"An' was it for that sake I was to be dragged from shelter an' carried prisoner to Prince Conan?" cried Ethlenn, the wind risin' sudden

an' shriekin' round the outer walls as she spoke. An' the three that served her left their places an' came nigher. But Cathal stood firm.

"May sore hurt come to them that would have done it," says he. "Lyin' knaves are any who put ill deeds at the door o' Conan. 'Tis o' yer free will ye shall come or stay. As for those who came before me, me hand shall pay them."

Then Ethlenn was silent, an' all that looked to her. Even the risin' wind waited on her words. At last she spoke—

"That payin' is done, Cathal o' the Mountain. 'Tis for many a day they will be mindin' the reckonin' of Ethlenn. An' here is me word for yer fair speakin'. Here stand I, Ethlenn o' the Mist; an' a strrong warrior are ye, Cathal. If ye can set me on yer horse fairly, I will ride with ye to the camp o' Conan, an' raise mist to cover the waves. If ye fail, ye shall go from here without hurt; an' if ye win, I look to ye to give me free returnin' when I have aided Prince Conan."

Now Cathal was watchin' close, an' before she had fair ended speakin' he shouted—"Me word for it!" an' sprang to grasp her. The three

maids laughed an' turned each to her task, not fearin' for Ethlenn.

As Cathal's arms met where she had been, Ethlenn was gone. He sudden remembered the tales told o' her; how she could change her seemin' in the eyes o' those that would hold her, by the power lyin' in her shinin' knife. So for all the seemin' he held fast, knowin' that she was there, an' feelin' what he could not see.

When he still kept his hold, the first maid laughed, an' there in his arms lay a sheaf o' red roses, an' their sharp thorns pierced his armour.

Still he held fast. Then the second maid called out a wild word, an' the roses were gone, an' through his arms fluttered many little small birdeens, flyin' in his face, an' fair takin' his breath. Yet quick he caught one in his hand an' clasped it close, for all it pecked him like a wild fierce thing. Then Deòin sthruck her harp, an' the birds were away, an' rain an' chilly sleet were beatin' over him, an' all the hall was dark. He came nigh to lettin' go, then, but in his palm he caught some dhrops o' wather, an' covered it sure with the other.

Then all disappeared, an' the pale fire shone out again; an' while there was still no sign of Ethlenn, he sudden felt somethin' catch in the rings o' his armour. Swift he put down his hand, an' 'twas the ice cold hilt o' the crystal dagger. An' as he grasped it, there stood Ethleen with fear in her eyes.

"Give me the dagger!" she cried, "an' I'll ride with ye. 'Tis o' no use to ye alone."

"When ye're fair seated on me horse," laughed Cathal, knowin' that he'd won.

Without a word more, she was out o' the hall like a blown feather, to where the black horse was waitin'. Cathal leaped to the saddle an' swung her up before him; then put the knife in her girdle o' threaded pearls. Off they galloped under clear moonlight, past the Ford o' the Shadow; an' swift along the river bank to where Conan's men were gathered.

There was cryin' o' welcome, but Conan lost no time. Quick he led her to the shore, an' pointed to the warships lyin' dark under the moon.

"Give us the boardin' o' them, an' choose

what reward ye will from King Murdough, Lady Ethlenn," says he.

Then the smile glinted in her eyes, an' she ran her white hands through her silken hair; an' before any knew whence it came, the sea was covered with heavy fog, an' the moon peered among clouds. Conan an' his men ran to the waitin' boats, an' paddled from shore; but Ethlenn sat on a rock, partin' her wavin' hair. Once an' twice came the clashin' o' swords on shields o' bronze, through the darkness; an' at last up rose a wild shoutin' for joy, an' the boats swept inshore, with Feargus in the foremost. Conan o' the Kingdom sprang to the beach an' spoke to her that had given help—

"Have yer will; for 'tis ye that gave us the victory," says he.

"Leave to return whence I was brought," says she, an' would have naught else. Then Cathal spoke.

"It is right o' mine to carry her home."

The two looked long in each other's eyes, an' at last Ethlenn shook her head.

"Nay, Cathal. Give me the horse, but 'tis

for ye to stay here for the fightin'. When the battle is won, come in friendship where ye came doubtin'." Springin' to the saddle, she rode away up the river bank. But in the hand o' Cathal lay the dagger o' crystal, an' he was content.

[“But what happened after the fighting was over?”

“Ah, sure, 'tis unsafe to be guessin' about Ethlenn. She might hear yees. So be off, an' make yer feet yer frinds.”]

VI

WILD APPLES AN' GOLDEN GRAIN

[“Ay, wakin’, sleepin’, or dhreamin’, ‘tis forever an’ more tales ye’d be afther hearkenin’ to. Wait till the day when I tell yees what came once of askin’ for too many o’ them. No, not the now. ‘Tis a far other sort I’ve in mind this morn’s mornin’.”]

‘TWAS Keevan Sthrong-arm ruled the men o’ the north, toward the sea-loughs. High up on the steep o’ the cliff stood his walled tower; an’ from the top o’ that same he could see far out across the old sea, where few ships ventured, barrin’ the Danes o’ the North Isles.

Now ‘twas for no fearin’ o’ the Danes for himself that he made thick walls an’ sstrong doors to his tower; but for guardin’ his daughter, Ardanna, that was sought by many, far an’ wide. A wilful maid was that, for a

king's daughter—an' ill fared it with all who came courtin' her. Many a stout young warrior she turned away sorrowin'; yet all the days she was growin' fairer an' more contrary.

At last came an hour when Keevan sat in his high seat an' looked down the long room. An' 'twas none but greybeards he saw.

"What has come to me fightin' men?" says he to Manis, that was wisest o' those in his court.

"'Tis for lovin' Ardanna too well they've fared off in the world to seek forgettin,'" says Manis, shakin' his old head.

Keevan stood up in a rage, an' turned to Ardanna, where she sat braidin' a ribbon into her dark hair, an' smilin' to her own thought.

"'Tis wed to a sthrong man ye should have been this many a day past!" he cried, "an' 'tis long enough I've had patience with ye! Now 'tis a task I'll be afther settin', an' that man who wins through it shall ye wed, be he young or old, warrior or herd boy. Else shall ye serve in field an' kitchen, bringin' wood an' carryin' wather, with none to aid."

Then the laughin' left the eyes of Ardanna.

Small wish had she for labourin'; yet anger was overpowerin' all else in her heart, an' at her lips were scornin' words as she glanced at the old men sittin' half sleepin'. Half minded was she to lay aside rich robes an' rare jewels, an' be off to draw wather by the river's shore, stayin' free from marryin'.

A sudden stirrin' came at the outer gate; an' in another stroke o' time two men were standin' within the door o' the great hall o' Keevan Sthrong-arm. Dressed in green they were, an' so like that scarce could any have told one from the other. Each had a bright sword hangin' at his side; an' over their broad shouldhers fell the long, yellow hair, curlin' fine as gold.

Ardanna stood lookin' at them, half fearin' what might be comin'; but Keevan strode down to greet them.

“ ‘Tis in a good hour ye've come to me roof,” says he. “I've somewhat to tell in the ears o' them that choose to hearken, be they friends or foes. Here stands Ardanna, daughter o' mine. Fair to see is she, yet through her folly have many good men gone from me. Hear this word—not given lightly. The hand of Ardanna

shall be for him who gathers wild apples an' harvests golden grain in the high valley o' Rinn, an' brings them to me."

The foremost o' the two turned eager to his brother—

" 'Tis a quest for us," says he.

"Ay," answered the other, "if it so please the Lady Ardanna."

Wondherin' she was at seein' two men so near like in face an' bearin'.

"An' if ye both win through?" she asked.

"Then shall ye set us another task, an' it may be one afther that. No thought had we o' provin' strength against each other; but now must it be seen which of us be the man worthy of Ardanna the wayward."

'Twas red as sundown her cheeks grew at that word, knowin' it well merited; but Keevan shook with a mighty laugh.

"As ye have said, so shall it be," says he.

"An' now what man's men are ye?"

"The men o' no man livin'," says the foremost, "now that Ingri, our father, lives no longer, an' the home of our dwellin' lies wasted with fire. Fionn am I, an' this, at me side, is

Fergal. In the same hour were we born; an' the quest is ours, Keevan Sthrong-arm."

"I have said it," answered Keevan, gruff like. He called servin' men, an' set the two brothers down to great platters o' roasted meat; an' Ardanna brought stone flagons o' foamin' mead, one to each man. So they ate an' drank like stout heroes, till hunger an' thirst were past.

Up beyant sat Keevan, his chin restin' in his hand, an' his heavy beard coverin' both like driftin' snow.

"If ye are as like in strength as in face an' body, 'twill be a long day before Ardanna is safe wedded," says he.

"Ay, but Fergal, me brother, has more power of arm than I," says Fionn.

"An' great wisdom has Fionn, beyant aught o' mine," laughed Fergal.

Then Ardanna, sittin' in shadow, saw wherein they differed. For while Fergal, that was more hardy, had eyes laughin' an' eager, Fionn sat ever watchful an' cool, waitin' for what should come. Yet through all else was a lovin' between them that would not be hidin'.

Now the night came on, an' in the great hall was singin' an' harpin'; an' the blaze o' logs on the wide hearth lighted up all around. By Ardanna sat her old nurse, Mor, that knew many things hidden from wise men. An' says Ardanna to her, whisperin'—

“Is there no charm to aid the man who would gather wild apples in the high valley o' Rinn?”

Mor bent her head, an' thought long. At last she plucked three long hairs from the flowin' locks o' Princess Ardanna.

“Bind them in a sheaf with these, twisted thrice; an' safe will they be brought home to Keevan.”

Ardanna glanced round, an' passed careless like across the hall to where sat Fergal. An' while none were noticin', she gave him the three hairs, an' told him the charm, scarce breathin'.

Fergal opened wide eyes.

“An' where is the man can bind apples in a sheaf?” says he; but careful that none should be afther hearin'.

“That I know not,” says Ardanna. “ 'Tis the counsel o' Mor, who sees clear what is hidden from many with great wisdom.”

Then Fergal nodded, content an' smilin', an' laid the three hairs, coiled in a ring, in his huntin' pouch. He kissed the little soft hand that had given them; an' Ardanna thought to herself how a strhong man would be a safeguard between her and all ills.

In the meantime Keevan Sthrong-arm was talkin' low an' earnest with Manis, that had told him the raison o' many forsakin' him. An' afther much colloquin' he beckoned Fionn to come near. An' says he, lowerin' his voice—

“ 'Twill take more wisdom nor strength to be masther o' the will o' the wilful. Ill is golden grain to harvest in the high valley o' Rinn. Take ye this little small net o' silk, an' in it ye may bring home what would slip through finer holes.”

Fionn stared at him, mazed like; but wisdom was his not to speak when words served no purpose, an' he gathered the little small net in his hand, an' folded it beneath his belt. An' afther that all went to rest.

When morn began to light the tops o' the eastern hills, Fionn and Fergal stood before the gate o' the tower, with Keevan an' Princess

Ardanna, an' all who served their will, waitin' to see the champions ride on their questin'.

Wilful still was the face o' the girleen that was cause for their goin'; but when at last both kissed her hand, an' rode off lightly to meet the risin' sun, she went to the top o' the tower, an' knelt there on the cold, rough stones, watchin' their goin' till naught could be seen more for the turnin' o' the road.

A long ride was it to the hills, an' hot was the sun as it came up overhead. When the shadows began to turn before them, they saw a tall cliff fornenst them, an' hills risin' ever above it.

"There lies the high valley o' Rinn," says Fionn, musin' to himself.

"An' how may we best reach it?" asked Fergal. "'Tis far an' away over our heads."

"There is but one road," says Fionn, "an' that the cliffside. Here must we leave our horses, an' climb up how we may, for the honourin' of Ardanna."

So both dismounted, an' tied the weary horses in the shade, where was runnin' wather near by.

Fionn thought o' the little small net, an' said

naught; but Fergal put his hand in his pouch, an' touched the circle o' fine hair. "For honourin' Ardanna!" says he, an' was off swift to the foot o' the cliff. Fionn was ready at his heels, an' up they sprang, leapin' across hollows, an' swingin' themselves up by holdin' to the points o' rock.

Once the foot o' Fionn slipped on a loose pebble, an' naught saved his fallin' back but the swift hand an' sstrong o' Fergal, reached out to save. An' again was Fergal nigh to throwin' his full weight on the branch of an ill-rooted bush, but was warned by the sharp cry o' Fionn, his brother.

"Twas a weary sstruggle before they reached the top o' the cliff, but neither could bide seein' his brother laggin' behind without aidin' him; an' as the sun's fire dipped into the western sea, they stood with clasped hands watchin' it sink.

A wild counthry it was above there, with tangled vines for thrippin' their feet, an' thorny bushes for hindherin' goin.'

"Wiser to sleep now, an' start the task by full day," counselled Fionn, an' Fergal nodded;

so they rested on the coarse grass, sleepin' sound as in the tower o' Keevan Sthrong-arm.

At the first glint o' dawn they were on their feet, eager an' glowin'.

"Each choose a path," says Fergal, "an' meet here when the sun is fair overhead."

"Well thought," answered Fionn. "Will ye go north or south?"

"Southward is the way o' the wind," says Fergal. "I face it to the north."

"I follow it toward the south," says Fionn; an' they parted, each breakin' way for himself through the bushes.

Now the valley o' Rinn was bound about with higher walls o' rock that no man livin' could pass beyant, an' 'twas o' no great length nor breadth. So just at noon the two brothers came crashin' through the undergrowth, an' met facin'.

"Here is me sheaf o' golden grain," says Fergal, pantin' with the weight o' the burden. An' "Here are wild apples for Keevan," laughed Fionn, droppin' them on the grass from a fold o' his cloak.

"Let them lie here," says Fergal. "None

will lay hand on them while ye search for ripe grain, where I found a plenty growin' to the north; an' I'll look to the south for the wild apples growin'."

" 'Tis a wise word," says Fionn; so not waitin' for eatin', or for aught but a sup o' cold wather from a little sthream that ran down the cliff-side, they parted again, an' went their ways. An' 'tis a thtrue word that never in all the valley o' Rinn could Fergal come on a tree o' wild apples; nor for all his searchin' could Fionn meet with a stalk o' yellow grain to put in his net. Worn an' footsore they sat at last in the place where they'd slept, lookin' each at what his brother had brought.

"A queer task is this," says Fergal at last. "Aisy what was of it, but little for our pains. An' to which will Keevan Sthrong-arm give the princess?"

"Time enough for that when we've our harvestin' safe in his tower," says Fionn.

"Ay, but a light matter is the goin' back," laughed Fergal.

"Wait an' see," says Fionn; an' stoopin' together, each took up his burden an' started

to climb down the cliff, for no other path was known.

Ill farin' was it; an' before long Fionn gave a sthrange cry. Fergal, lookin' across to him, saw a fearsome sight. The apples, happed up in his cloak, were sendin' up tall shoots o' green, an' branches growin' ever thicker; an' 'twas vain for Fionn to grasp them to him. With a spring, Fergal reached his side, an' catchin' the three hairs from his pouch, twisted them thrice an' threw them in the branches. An' on the instant they were bound together in a sheaf, an' the weight o' them was gone entirely, so that Fionn had no more throuble in gettin' down the rocks.

But now 'twas Fergal's turn to need helpin'. As he grasped the golden grain more firm like, all sudden his feet were tangled with the roots it sent down, an' he stumbled an' nigh went crashin' down to his death.

Fionn, lookin' back, saw his plight, an' for a breath he waited, rememberin' Princess Ardanna. Then he dashed away the evil dhreamin', an' quick as light he drew the net from his belt, flinging it round the sproutin'

grain. An' the roots were all caught in; an' Fergal reached the ground below with ne'er a slip afther.

Few words passed between them as they mounted horse an' rode westward; but as they came to the turn in the road, Fionn drew rein, an' Fergal likewise.

"Ardanna should be for ye," says Fionn, "for ye carry her the great sheaf o' golden grain, an' I found ne'er a stalk."

"By yer aid I won it," says Fergal. "An' ye found wild apples where I saw none afther."

"An' would have been over the cliff had ye not aided in time," says Fionn.

" 'Tis fair foolery for us to try rivallin'," says Fergal, "yet where's him shall settle it?"

"Wait," says Fionn. " 'Twas Keevan gave me the net that lies across yer grain."

"An' 'twas Ardanna's self laid three hairs in me hand for bindin' wild apples," says Fergal.

"Ay, there lies the puzzle solved," cried Fionn. "Moreover, 'twas in me mind to leave ye without helpin' on the cliff-side, an' foul

shame would it have been to me. Wherefore is this word a just one. For me was the thought o' Keevan; but for ye is the heart of Ardanna."

An' together they rode to the gate o' the seaward tower, an' Fergal carried in the burdens an' laid them at the feet o' Keevan; but off into the sunny world rode Fionn, singin' a gay song —to seek fairer fortune with a light heart—for knowin' that he had won naught by faithlessness.

VII

KING DIARMID AN' PÒL

[“Be off now, for I’ll not lave me work waitin’ while I’m rubbin’ me brain to think of old wives’ talk! Betther to let me go out, peaceable like, as Pòl said to King Diarmid, in place o’ holdin’ yer nursery door to kape me in. A—ah, sure an’ ’tis in for it I am, afther that careless word; so sit down, with yer red apples to roast, an’ hearken while I tell ye how it came about.”]

’TWAS mighty fond o’ money was King Diarmid. Not for spendin’ it on rich clothin’, or to have a fine place for livin’ in, or to have a grand big army at his beckonin’; but just for sake o’ savin’ it an’ pilin’ it up in his sstrong room—that was the only shpot in all his castle not leakin’ at the roof an’ four sides, an’ lettin’ in rain that aisy.

Sure, so little was he for gettin' the good o' that pile o' gold, that he went abroad in a faded old doublet that was scarce holdin' together, but for bein' mended every day by Queen Dorcha; an' the storms beat in free on the floors o' the old tumble-down castle, where the laste bit o' wind shook the doors an' windows nigh to fallin' in; an' his servin' men an' his soldiers were paid so ill that 'twas scant good he got o' them.

Even his sons went off to far lands to seek fortune, havin' small likin' for stayin' with him an' nigh on starvin' (forbye they went huntin', unbeknownst like, an' roasted their game over a fire o' sticks in the forest). But never a bit matthered all that to King Diarmid, while his pile o' sacks o' money was fillin' his sstrong room half to the rafters, an' the great heavy iron key (the one bit o' shaped iron in the castle not red with rustin') hung safe at his belt, ready for usin' day or night.

Now fine sstrong young men were his sons, an' good at leapin' an' wrestlin' an' fightin' too; an' as long as they were bidin' in that part o' the counthry, none dreamed o' meddlin'

with King Diarmid; but when the neighbourin' kings and high chieftains learned that no longer would any o' them stay near his father, an' that Diarmid's fightin' men were growin' fewer each day that dawned, they minded the tales told o' the raison o' that same, an' began to think how pleasin' 'twould be to see his bags o' gold hoppin' into their own keepin'—that would know well how to make betther use o' them.

So all looked round to search out good excuses for invadin' his lands; an' before long 'twas every few days some train o' men in armour came riding up to the castle o' Diarmid, wantin' him to pay for some hurt done by his people. An' while Diarmid knew 'twas but shammin' to wring gold from him, yet so scant was his army, an' so full o' discontent, that he dared not threaten resistin', for fearin' he'd need to pay up his soldiers before they'd be afther fightin' his battles.

He tried puttin' off their claimin' with soft words an' excuses, but ever an' always they came again, an' with more men at their backs, demandin' gold. An' at last came a day when payin' had to be done, whatever came next, for

men o' three kingdoms were battherin' at his gates, that would stand but little o' such threatment. Mournin' he was as he sent word for openin' the doors an' lettin' them in; an' a long face was his, as he stood peerin' at a little hole in the wall, watchin' them ridin' away afther, each by his own road, an' carrying the good gold before them on their saddle-bows.

He locked up the low iron door, an' raged round somethin' fearful, so that poor Queen Dorchá was dreadin' lest her life might go next. When he had made an end o' stravagin' an' dancin' furious up stairs an' down the halls, he went out an' sat at the cross roads talkin' to himself.

“ ‘Tis a beggar I’ll be before me hour!” says he. “An’ me ungrateful sons leavin’ me to be plundhered unmerciful like. An’ when those villains o’ King Mahon an’ King Duvan an’ his brother get home an’ tell their masthers that I’ve gold laid up, ‘tis no peace o’ me life I’ll be havin’. An’ none to turn to for tellin’ me what to do to get the betther o’ them an’ their plottin’ to rob me.”

Now while he was sittin’ lamentin’ he heard

a quare small sound behind him, in the long grass; an' whippin' round quick an' unexpected, he caught sight o' somethin' scarlet slippin' past him. Sudden as a flash he reached for it; an' though he lost balance an' went heels over head off the stone where he'd been perchin', yet when he picked himself up an' shook the dust from his old duds, he was still holdin' on to the bit o' red, that was a wee small pointed cap.

He looked at it, in an' outside, as if he was hopin' to find gold in it; an' then an odd bit of a voice piped up—

“ ‘Tis me cap o' power ye're squeezin' in yer big awkward hands. Give it to me, or may evil follow ye all the way ye go—sittin' or standin' or goin' an' payin' gold.”

This last frightened King Diarmid, an' he looked up from the wee thing, an' there in the dust o' the road stood none other than the king o' the Little People, holdin' out his hand, an' hoppin' from one foot to its mate for eagerness to have his own again. But King Diarmid was crafty, havin' heard much o' what the Little People were able to do.

"What'll ye give me for returnin' it?" asked he.

"Whatever ye've a mind to ask for while I'm afther countin' ten," says the little man; an' with that he began—"One! Two! Three!"—an' thtrue it was that King Diarmid could think o' naught but what had been in his mind the moment before.

"Some one to advise me how to get the better o' they robbers," he gasped, fearin' that he'd not get the words out fast enough. But the little king laughed, with somethin' wickeder nor words in the chuckle o' him.

"That I will," says he. "An' a fine counsellor ye'll be afther findin' him. Sure, Pòl is his name; an' advice is the very marrow o' his bones an' the blood o' his body, so don't be usin' him up too fast, an' be left wantin' him."

With that he pulled a wee, tiny dotteen of a man from his own pouch, an' held him up like a doll in his hand.

"Grow bigger!" says he to that same. "Grow bigger! Grow up! Grow up! I'm tellin' ye what's for yer good. Grow up! Grow up!" An' as he spoke the wee thing began to take on

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size; an' before King Diarmid's eyes it sudden grew to be as high as the king o' the Little People, an' mighty like him to look at.

“ ‘Twas advice I was givin’ him, ye see,” says the small king, settin’ him down in the road, an’ snatchin’ his cap. “ ‘Tis that he lives on. But keep him on scant allowance, cautious like, or he’ll masther ye. On the other hand, see that ye don’t ask too much o’ him at one advisin’, an’ that ye follow the word he gives.” An’ the bit king was gone like a puff o’ smoke.

King Diarmid quick caught up the little counsellor, an’ ran home with him to the castle, an’ set him in a corner while he took breath.

“Ye must lodge me in a room where no rain comes in,” says Pòl, lookin’ round an’ here an’ there at the broken windows an’ the sinkin’ rafthers, an’ at the holes in the roof where the sun was pourin’ in.

“But there’s none, only me sstrong room,” says Diarmid, fearful for his store o’ gold pieces.

“Then must ye put me there,” says the little man. An’ so it had to be.

Now before long, by heedin’ the advisin’ o’

wee Pòl, King Diarmid began to be gettin' even with all his foes, an' his riches grew without disturbin'; for he learned to be afther settin' traps that showed all men trespassin' how he was no more to be put upon.

But 'twas careful King Diarmid had to be; for each time that he asked concernin' somethin', he saw the thing shrink a bit, an' grow less, an' he remembered how the king o' the Little People had warned him. He'd no idea how to help matthers without riskin' makin' him grow too big; yet 'twas not aisy to keep from gettin' his relief from throubles, an' by reason o' that he noticed, one day, that his small man was but half the size he'd been.

"What shall I do with ye?" he asked, puzzled dreadful.

"Put me out to sit in the middle o' the road," says Pòl, "an' hearken what comes next."

So Diarmid carried him out to the cross roads, an' set him down; an' there he started up howlin', so that all comin' by stopped to look.

"I've hurt me toe!" cried Pòl the counsellor.

"Put it in the runnin' wather," says one.

"Rub it well," says another; an' the one

afther had his own way o' curin' bruises with a bit o' cobweb, an' told it to him. An' with each piece of advisin' given him the creature grew fatter an' taller, as it had been somethin' good for eatin'. An' when he was as big as afore-time, King Diarmid lugged him home again to keep company with his bags o' riches, that had grown till they nigh filled the strhong room.

" 'Twas a dish of advice I was needin','" says the wee thing. "Ye'd well nigh starved me for want o' that same."

"An' what kind do ye like?" says Diarmid.

"Any that comes," was the answer. " 'Tis all alike it tastes." So whenever the King thought wee Pòl was shrinkin' because o' givin' him too much advice, he recommended him to tie his shoe, or to brush his coat, or somethin' o' the sort; or talked serious to him about bein' generous; an' he grew right away, an' throve mightily.

Now a time came when his sons turned up at the castle gate for to be afther visitin' their old home. An' Diarmid kept the door o' his money room fast locked, for fear o' their gettin' any, or perhaps makin' friends with Pòl, an'

gettin' advice about askin' their father for a few gold pieces.

“ ‘Tis not goin’ to do at all, keepin’ me shut up in here,” says the little man. “Betther to let me out.”

“Not I,” says Diarmid. “I’ve a wiser plan nor that in me mind.”

“Ay, but let me go peaceable,” says Pòl.

“Keep ye still,” says Diarmid; an’ with that word for his supper, the wee man had to be content.

But him that was used to runnin’ round the castle at will, took ill to bein’ behind bars; an’ all King Diarmid could get from him was, “Let me out! let me out!”

Moreover, the sons were beginnin’ to be curious about the sstrange thing that squealed in beyant; an’ asked more questions than Diarmid found comfortin’.

There came a night when thunder rumbled an’ growled at a great rate; an’ the lightnin’ was amazin’ bright. But when King Diarmid went in for his good-night peep at the little man, all he could spy was a small dark thing perched on the bags, up in a corner.

"I advise ye solemnly to let me out o' here, or ye'll repent it!" says the small voice o' him.

"When me sons is gone," answered Diarmid, not even offerin' him advice on bein' silent, but goin' out again an' fastenin' the door. An' he an' his family sat down to what supper there was.

An' now began a terrible racketin', drownin' the roarin' o' thunder, an' the dhrippin' o' rain on their supper table, by that same token. 'Twas "Let me out!" in a big voice first; then "Let me out!" in one fainter, till with it all ye'd ha' thought each stone in the cracked old castle was shoutin' to get out of its lodgin'. Hard work had Diarmid to hold his sons from searchin' to see what was wrong; but at last the squealin' ceased, an' all was quiet.

But when—that very next morn's mornin'—Diarmid went to speak with his counsellor, sure, not a shadow o' Pòl was to be found in any chink; for he'd done naught less than squealin' advice to King Diarmid to let him go free, till he'd squealed himself—body an' clothes an' small red nose—away into nothin' at all, an' never was he seen more.

[“And King Diarmid had to take care of his
money all alone?”]

“Ay, sure; an’ ye’ll know now what they
mean when ye hear them sayin’ that a man
shrinks from givin’ advice. So be off while
there’s enough o’ me left to tend to me
weedin’.”]

VIII

FAIR AILINN

[“Hark, now, at the cowld wind blowin’, the night! ‘Tis fine an’ thankful yees should be feelin’ to be in warm shelter, an’ not wandherin’ abroad. Sit there by the fire, an’ roast yer nuts peaceable like, while I’m afther tellin’ yees what happened once, on a night as like this as the two eyes in yer faces.”]

Ay, ‘twas a night worse nor this, that the wind came howlin’ an’ bringin’ the snow down from the mountains an’ pilin’ it at the gates o’ Breogan the Red. But little cared he for what the wind might be doin’. ‘Twas chieftain over the men o’ Lough Derg he was, an’ his house was sthrong built o’ hewn oak; an’ while the roof was but low, the buildin’ was well shielded round with walls of earth, like a fort.

In by a fine roarin' fire sat Breogan the Red—though by that same token 'twas no longer red, but white with years his hair was grown. An' near him, at the feet o' one spinnin', sat Aongas, his son, carvin' a cup for dhrinkin' from a bit o' wood, while the men an' maids went about their workin'. Breogan was dhreamin' o' fightin' long past, an' Aongas bent over his carvin', but ever an' often they turned to look at Fair Ailinn, as she stood in the glow o' the flames, dhrawin' the thread o' white wool from her distaff.

Afther a bit she began to sing, an' so sweet was that same that only one o' the maids heard a low knockin' at the outer gate. She stole out, quiet like, to find who was there—an' without stood an old man, carryin' a harp, an' seemin' nigh perishin' with the cowld. She signed him to pass into the hall, while she barred the gate behind him; so alone he came to the doorway an' stood watchin' Fair Ailinn with hungry eyes. Never one looked up till he said—

“Save all here.”

Then all eyes turned to him, an' Ailinn, puttin' down distaff an' spindle, came forward an'

led him to the fire, an' took his tatthered old cloak, hangin' it to dhry. She bid a servin' maid bring him meat an' dhrink, an' not till he was warmed an' fed did any ask whither he came.

“ ‘Tis a singer without a name I am,” says he to Breogan, “an’ a wandherer over the land to seek the one whose touch on me harp shall bring me me heart’s desire.”

“An’ what may that be?” asked Aongas, lookin’ up with fearless eyes like a young eagle; but the old man shook his head an’ answered naught.

“Have ye music in yer harp for us to hear?” asked Breogan.

“Ay,” says the man—and struck so loud an’ clear a note that all ears were listenin’ for what might follow. Then, of a sudden like, he broke into a war song, with the clash o’ swords in every line—singin’ so strhong an’ fierce that Aongas sprang to his feet with eyes flashin’ as he had seen battle nigh.

“Too rare a singer ye are to be wandherin’ in storm an’ sleet,” says Breogan. “Stay here

while ye will.” An’ Fair Ailinn brought him a great horn o’ mead.

Then he swept the sthrings again, an’ ‘twas a lament for warriors fallen in battle, an’ the keenin’ o’ women was never so sad as that same. An’ Breogan shaded his face with his hand, not carin’ to let any see how he was feelin’.

Now afther a time the harper rested from playin’, an’ sat on the bench by the fire, leanin’ his harp on his knee. An’ says Aongas—

“Why for have ye no head carved on the pillar o’ yer harp? ‘Tis naught but a shapeless block.”

“For that I have not found me heart’s desire,” says he. “But old I’m growin’, an’ no longer shall it be without form. Give me leave to carve on it the head o’ yer fair daughter, Breogan, son o’ Cennedigh.”

“Leave have ye, though no child o’ mine is she save in lovin’. The light o’ me house has she been since the day when I found her lyin’ sleepin’, a lost birdeen, on the shores o’ Lough Derg.” An’ Breogan laid his hand on her hair—like floss o’ black silk it was—as she knelt by him. An’ she looked up, with love in her

smilin'. Then the old harper caught the gravin' knife from the hand of Aongas.

"Bide as ye are, Fair Ailinn, till I've the image o' yer face carven out," he cried; an' all in the hall pressed nigher to see what he would do.

An' while Aongas was betther nor many at the shapin' o' wood an' horn an' bone, yet he could do naught to compare with this. As they stood gazin', the very face o' Fair Ailinn seemed to grow from out the block o' wood, even to the soft curl on her fair forehead, an the shinin' jewel in her ear.

Aongas looked long, an' turned away sore against his will; but the hour had come when 'twas his care to watch at the gate till morn, an' he went out to his post.

"Rare skill ye have, harper without a name," says Breogan, "an' if gold can buy the work o' yer hands, 'tis for ye to name yer price."

"Wait," answered the harper. "Wait an' hearken."

Then as they strained their ears for listenin', came tremblin' on the air a sound soft as the singin' o' Fair Ailinn, or the rustle o' wind

in the deep o' the ferns. An' the men an' maids ceased their comin' an' goin', an' sank speechless on the benches round the hall; an Breogan nodded drowsy like—an' the head o' Fair Ailinn drooped lower, restin' on his knee—an' all under the roof, forebye the harper himself, were too heavy in sleep for dhreamin'.

One last note he touched, an' up rose Fair Ailinn, her sweet eyes fast closed, an' came toward him like a white mist blown across runnin' wather. The face o' the harper was full o' wild triumphin'.

"Gold first," he cried. "Give it in me hands!"

He pushed the harp so that her soft fingers rested on the sstrings, an' as a note wavered, there were his withered old hands heaped with shinin' money.

"'Tis me heart's desire!" he shouted, knowin' that none could wake to hear. He lifted the harp, an' stepped backward toward the door, playin' a song so wild an' so sStrange that Fair Ailinn followed, ever nigher to that harp whose head was like the shadow o' her own in the dyin' firelight, till in a breath she

vanished, an' naught remained but the image. Quick the old man threw his ragged cloak round him, took the harp on his shoulher, an' went out to the gate, where stood Aongas, watchin' in the night an' dark.

" 'Tis not goin' out ye are!" says the lad.

"Ay," says the harper. At sight o' his face Aongas fell back, for the gate was swingin' open before him without help o' hand, an' before he knew it the old man was out an' away. At that same moment the snow ceased fallin', an' when the moon shone from behind a cloud, no man was to be seen.

Aongas thought sthrange of it, an' afther watchin' an' wondherin', he felt it right to go in an' speak o' the matter to Breogan. An' there, heavy in sleep, lay Breogan, an' round him the men an' maids, an' no touch o' his could rouse any there. He went to the room o' Fair Ailinn, but the door stood open, an' none within. He ran through house an' hall, an' without in the courtyard, but ne'er a footprint was in the snow, barrin' his own an' the old harper's. Nowhere was sign o' Fair Ailinn, an' he knew that she had been stolen away.

Only half knowin' what he was doin', he caught up sword an' cloak, an' rushed out to follow the track o' the harper in the snow. Through the night he pushed on swiftly, past the little Lough, an' over the hills, goin' ever westward toward the old sea. Never a sight had he o' livin' mortal, though the bright o' the moon showed him the print o' feet that seemed never to weary. But the very wind blowin' on his back seemed helpin' Aongas forward, an' when morn came, he was near a half-ruined, dark, old castle, on a crag overlookin' Mal Bay, where the winter waves were beatin' up on the shore. The marks led to a closed gate, but he waited for a breath before beatin' at it. An' in that moment he spied a bit of a fisher's hut, far down the shore, an' he thought it wise to ask there for word o' Fair Ailinn an' the old harper.

A frightened bit of a lass stood in the door, an' shook her head at his questionin'.

" 'Tis never more ye'll see her if she's been stolen away by Oisin, son o' Lua," whispered she. " 'Tis a terrible sorcerer he is, an' five hundred year has he lived in that castle, with

ne'er a stone fallen or a hinge rusted beyant what it was when he first went in at the door. That which he has desired has he played on his harp, an' there before him would be the thing he willed to have. But in these days much o' that power has gone from him, for his wicked doin's. Sleep, an' rule over wind an' wather are his; but the gold that he loves, an' the renewin' o' his wicked life, must be played for him by a fair maid with true love in her heart. For that will he have stolen Fair Ailinn, an' hidden her where none can free her save that man who has no fearin' in his heart; an' where's he who fears not Oisin?"

Aongas laughed, with eyes sparklin' like the risin' sun on the sea. "No fear o' livin' man have I," says he. "Give me a fisher's coat in place o' me cloak, an' ashes to darken me face, an' we shall see what will come o' the power o' Oisin."

So the fisher lass helped him to change his looks, an' Breogan his father would not have known him for the fine young warrior he'd seen leavin' the hall to guard the gate. An' up to the castle of Oisin he went an' knocked boldly.

Afther some waitin' the harper opened, an' already he seemed younger nor before.

"What's yer will?" asked he.

"Me boat is wrecked on the rocks," says Aongas, "an' no way o' gainin' me livin' have I. Give me work, an' naught but food will I ask in return."

Now Oisin was weary o' the work o' carryin' away an' storin' the gold that Fair Ailinn had played for him, an' little thinkin' he beckoned the lad to enter, knowin' that all fishers along that coast knew well an' feared the breath o' his name—knowin' his power over wind an' wather, by reason o' his magic harpin'.

"Carry these bags to the tower beyant," says he, "while I sleep. An' afther I'll give ye yer food."

Within, Aongas saw a long, dark hall, with naught o' furnishin' save a wooden settle, an' a dusty, broken harp by it.

"Never lay hand on that," says Oisin, followin' his look. "If ye do, 'twill vanish, an' yer life will be mine in payment."

Aongas nodded, pretendin' to be frightened at the thought; but his heart leaped, for on the

pillar o' the harp he saw the likeness o' Fair Ailinn. So Oisin showed him where to carry the bags o' money, an' watched him a bit as he toiled up the tower stair to the sstrong room —then went back to the hall an' lay down on the bench, shammin' sleepin'. But he had a quare thought that within the fisherman's eyes was no real fear o' him, an' danger to his heart's desire lay in that same, so he waited for Aongas to come down to try him.

An' as the lad bent for a heavy sack, there was a terrible barkin', an' he saw the whole hall filled with fierce dogs, comin' at him to tear him. Aongas looked at them, careless like, though two had teeth in his coat, an' shook Oisin by the shouldher o' him.

"Call off yer beasts," says he. "'Tis loath I am to harm them." An' there was a ring in his voice not like that of a fisher lad. Oisin muttered a word, an' the hall was clear; but still he seemed sleepin'.

When Aongas came down the stair again, he made but a step on the floor, an' sudden like it was slidin' away from under his feet, an' all the walls waverin' as if to fall an' crush him.

Quick as a flash he gave a spring an' landed on top o' Oisin; an' at that all was as before. An' the ashes fell from his face, an' Oisin knew him; but no word he spoke, thinkin' that Aongas might as well finish the carryin' o' the treasure before bein' killed for followin'.

The third time came Aongas, when 'twas growin' toward night, an' all the sacks o' gold were stored, an' his service ended. An' as he bent to speak, great flames burst in through all the windows an' doors, an' no way o' gettin' out. Aongas saw Oisin disappear from the bench where he'd been lyin', like a shadow afther sunset, an' he knew that this last happenin' was no jestin', for the heat grew ever fiercer; but still was no fearin' in his heart. Lastly his eye fell on the harp. A faint tremblin' sound came from it, an' the thought o' seein' the face o' Fair Ailinn, though 'twas but carved in wood, made black an' charred by fire, was more nor he could dhream o' lettin' come to pass.

“Betther to see the harp vanish, than that,” says he, reckless. “Oisin can do no more nor take me life from me, be it by fire or sorcery.”

He caught the harp on his arm, an' struck ringin' music from it. An' as it echoed up into the smoky rafters, of a sudden the fire was gone, an' in the dark stood Aongas, with Fair Ailinn clasped close to him, an' the wind blowin' cold from the sea. The moon shone in at a high window, an' on the floor lay the cloak o' Oisin. Aongas lifted it to wrap about Fair Ailinn, an' there, beneath, was all that ever men saw more o' Oisin son o' Lua. An' a little heap o' dust was that same. Sure, five hundred years had he worked ill for his own pleasure; an' when his enchantin' went against him, the years came back.

“A good endin’, that, for all who work evil,” says Aongas. Catchin’ up Fair Ailinn, he sprang down to the gate, which stood swingin’ in the moon shadows as the wind blew, for the bars were naught but heaps o’ rust in their sockets.

“ ‘Tis for home we’re bound,” laughed he, with a light heart.

Now throue it is that when they reached the house o’ Breogan the Red, all lay as Aongas had left them, sleepin’ this way an’ that; an’

none roused till Fair Ailinn laughed an' sang with gladness at bein' there once more.

Breogan sat up an' rubbed his eyes.

“ ‘Tis dhreamin’ o’ dhreamin’ I’ve been,” says he, “but I’ve woke in time for a weddin’.”

An’ to the last day of all there, none knew that they had lost a day an’ a night from their lives.

[“And was the old man never heard of again?”]

“Never no more, for he blew away entirely. If ye doubt me word, go to Mal Bay, an’ see what a power o’ dust lies on the shore to this day.”]

IX

THE SERVIN' O' CULAIN

[“Nay, nay, then. An end to yer chatter. Never a man learned his lessons by sittin' down an' paintin' a picture o' the teacher; an' 'tis never a bridge yees will be afther crossin' by dhreamin' o' what's on the other side. 'Tis hard work that counts, in the end. Hear now!”]

'TWAS Culain was youngest son to King Ciad; an' fonder he was o' lyin' on the cliffs an' hearkenin' to the beatin' o' the waves, or o' the harpin' an' singin' in the hall, than o' battlin' an' strife. Yet all was not from wantin' strength an' skill, but for lackin' raison for tryin' them.

Fine sthrong men were his two brothers, an' good at the sword-play, an' had scant patience with Culain for his aisy-goin' ways. Yet was

there throue lovin' between them, an' many a time they shielded him from the wrath o' King Ciad. However, at last an' at length he got an inklin' o' what like his youngest son was gettin' to be, an' one mornin' he called the three to him.

" 'Tis thinkin' o' sharin' me kingdom between the three o' yees I am,'" says he, "bein' as I'm growin' old. But first I'd be afther knowin' what each o' yees has done to show himself a man worthy o' rulin' men."

Well now, they looked at each other, not bein' boastful warriors, but either waitin' for his brother to speak before him.

"What now?" says old King Ciad, lookin' up expectin' under his white brows.

Then spoke up Firbis, that was eldest: "When me brother Ingri was attacked by the men o' Torcal the Dane, he fought his way out, five to one, an' reached home by wadin' the rapids in season to warn us. An' bitther cold was the wather on his wounds."

Then Culain says, eager like: "When the wild boar came nigh to killin' me, 'twas Firbis thrust the spear into his throat, never fearin' for him-

self. An' he outwitted the men o' the North Isles, capturin' their long ships when they were ashore, an' hindherin' them from burnin' the dûn."

"An' what has Culain done to be deservin' his share?" asked King Ciad. "Has none a good word for him, nor tale of a brave deed?"

"Sthrong of arm is he," says Firbis, slow o' speech, "an' can sing songs o' battle an' tell rare tales o' heroes."

"What use the sthrong arm when 'tis put to no good purpose?" says the King. "Is that the best ye have to tell?"

"Nay," says Ingri. "But yester-morn he drew Donncha, the groom, from a deep pit where he had lain, bruised, through the night, an' brought him in on his shouldher; an' many a load o' fagots has he carried through the forest to the hut o' Bethoc, that was his nurse."

But Culain stood silent.

"A servin' man could well have done as much," says Ciad. "No part o' this kingdom o' mine is for one who has done naught to win it. What king would marry his daughter to a sluggard?"

Then the hot blood leapt to the face o' Culain. "Sluggard shall ye name me no longer!" he cried. "A princess will I win for me own, an' bring her to share me birthright; or if ye will, give the kingdom to Firbis an' Ingri, an' a kingdom o' me own will I conquer, or die tryin'."

"Well spoken," answered the old king, hidin' the gladness that warmed his heart at the words o' the lad. "But as I say, so shall it be. Take a sword, an' what horse ye choose; an' a purse with ten gold pieces will I give to ye; and then be off into the world to seek yer fortune an' learn what it means to be o' the blood o' kings. A year an' a day, an' two days more I give ye, to prove that ye've the heart of a brave man, an' to win yer right to a third o' me lands."

So Culain took his sstrong sword, an' the purse from his father's hand, an' went down to get a horse to ride. An' there in the stable stood Bethoc, the crone that had been nurse to his mother before him.

" 'Tis out in the world ye're goin'," says she, leanin' on her staff.

"Ay," says Culain, stout like.

“Then give me a promise before ye mount. For though they may call ye sluggard, yet have ye learned o’ me one thing that is above buyin’ in battle—that the word of a king’s son can be neither bent nor broken.”

“Have yer promise, then, for that wise lesson,” says Culain, waitin’ patient for what she should ask.

“Then ‘tis that ye heed an’ remember an’ obey the words I’m afther speakin’ to ye now. Hearken, Culain, son o’ King Ciad. ‘Tis through servin’ ye’ll gain skill an’ power that could come to ye in no other way; an’ through that same ye’ll at last reach the road for winnin’ the good that’s comin’ to ye if yer heart fails not. Hold fast to yer word once given, an’ set yer hand to naught without carryin’ it through. Mindin’ that, all will go well in the end, though it seem blacker nor storm in winter. Me word is said.”

Then Culain dhropped the silken purse in her withered hand.

“Ye’ll be needin’ it more nor meself,” says he; an’ from a stall he took the best horse that offered. Then, with a wave o’ the hand to the

ones watchin' at the gate, he rode away into the deep forest, with the words o' Bethoc runnin' ever an' all the time in his mind.

For many an hour he held on his way, never seein' livin' thing (forbye 'twas the birds singin' in the branches, or a roe deer leapin' up the mountain side), till he came to a deep valley, far from the sea. An' there he came on a low hut, built o' booughs; an' before it two men sittin', fishin' in a little small sthream that ran by, convenient like. Torn an' tatthered lookin' they were, but not seemin' to mind aught, or be shamed by their quare looks.

“Save all here,” says Culain, dismountin' and stoopin' to dhrink the runnin' wather.

“ ‘Tis welcome ye are,” says the first ragged man, pullin' up a little fish. When the second fellow saw it wrigglin' on the hook, he dhropped his own line, an' they fell to throwin' dice to see which should have it. An' Culain had never seen that done at all.

“Who are ye?” he asked, wondhèrin'.

“Jolly beggar-men,” says the first. “Taig am I; an' this, me fellow, is Derg o' the Mill, bein' dhriven out o' one for not workin’.”

— “An’ what sort o’ playin’ is that ye’re afther?” asked Culain, ever one to be aisy led from his purpose, an’ forgettin’ what errand he rode on.

“Thry it an’ see, if ye’ve aught worth stakin’,” laughed Derg o’ the Mill. “ ‘Tis rare sport ye’ll find it, an’ well suitin’ a fine lad like yerself.”

Culain, willin’ to learn, sat down on the green bank, an’ began throwin’ dice with the two beggar-men, stakin’ what he had against the small triflin’ things they played for, till luck left him entirely. Sure, first thing he knew, the horse was Taig’s, an’ Derg o’ the Mill was flourishin’ the fine sword he’d won.

“We’ll be afther sellin’ them quick, to the first that comes passin’ by,” says Derg.

“Wait,” says Culain. “Is there no way for me to get them again? Ill honour is it to me for losin’ them.”

“Have ye naught else to stake?” asked Taig.

“Nay,” says Culain, “an’ no more would I risk if I had. An evil day is this wherein I’m afther meetin’ yees.”

“Ay, but wait,” says Taig. “Three beggar-

men are we now, an' may do great things as any king's son, if we fare out into the world together. Will ye buy back yer horse with six months o' servin' us?"

"That will I," answered Culain, "an' me sword with other six."

"Done," says Derg. "An' I'll cast in the bargain the teachin' o' ye how to wile singin' birds, an' what else I know; an' Taig 'll give ye the word that makes flowers bloom where 'tis spoken. An' in the end ye may amount to somethin' worthy o' makin' a third in our company, an' thravelin' with us where we go."

So poor Culain, shamed to tell them how he was a king's son seekin' fortune an' a princess, served the two beggar-men, dhrawin' wather an' buildin' the fire an' roastin' meat. Many a time he'd have given much to slip away by night an' off to freedom, but bound by his given word he was, both to the beggar-men that had won his horse an' sword, an' to Bethoc. So he bent to his labourin' with a will, every day growin' sstrong an' more active; an' many a thrick o' cunnin' sword-play he learned o' Derg, that had been a fightin' man till he grew too

lazy. An' Taig, that had given up bein' a blacksmith to take to beggin', showed him many a strrange way o' managin' horses.

An' as the days went on, Culain asked many a time if they were never goin' out in the world to win honour, an' always they promised that 'twould be on the next day comin' they'd be off; but the day never came at all, for there was always more throwin' o' dice, or some one stoppin' beside the road for gossipin', or some rare good cause for puttin' off actin' like men. An' Culain was fair distracted from bein' so restless—havin' to stay servin' beggar-men when great deeds were doin' out beyant. Yet ever the counsel o' Bethoc came in his mind, an' for the pride o' him he'd not take back the word once given.

“Why not be takin' things aisy, like us?” Taig would say. “ ‘Tis as good as bein' kings, an' not half the throuble, sittin' here an' lettin' life go on, without frettin' our minds about what matthers.” But Culain was fast learnin' different; though ne'er a word came from him as to his bein' a prince.

Now 'twas nigh on the end o' the twelfth

month o' his servin', when one passed bearin' news.

" 'Tis from the court o' King Murtagh I come," says he, "where lives a fair maid, daughter o' the king's brother, Donal, that was slain in the great battle o' the White Ford. Morna, Love o' Sunshine, they call her. An' much talkin' o' gold an' silver, an' buyin' an' bargainin' has she heard in the court o' Murtagh (who would make a betther merchant nor leader in battle, by that same token), till from dislikin' to that has she sworn to wed none save him who shall bring her the gift which no gold nor silver can buy. An' King Murtagh holds her to that, sayin' that that man shall she sure wed, be he plain servin' lad or one o' high degree. An' her a right king's daughter! Ay, but 'tis some thrickery lies under all, to me mind. 'Twill be aisy sayin' 'Take her,' but I'm thinkin' that man 'll be needin' to ride with drawn sword, or never will he win free from the gates."

"Oho!" says Taig, seein' the man ridin' on his way afther speakin', "'tis to the court o' King Murtagh we'll be goin'. Maybe we'll get

a princess for wife to one of us, an' never need to work more. An' for his talk o' thrickery, 'twas but to put us off the thrack.'" An' Derg agreed—grinnin' with his ugly face.

So they had Culain pack up what goods there were, an' tie them in a bundle to carry on his shouldher; an' he followed on foot where they two rode on the horse. An' much he thought to himself, but said naught, knowin' that one day more would set him free o' them, an' eager to be off an' doin' man's deeds.

When they rode into the outer court o' King Murtagh's dwellin', there, standin' in a doorway, was Princess Morna; an' Love o' Sunshine was she, for on her sweet head it shone like the rare gold. When Culain set eyes on her, 'twas as if fire had leapt into his heart, an' he cast his burden far from him, in the hour o' his freedom, scornin' the touch of it. But all around were laughin' at the look o' the beggar-men, an' many stout warriors gathered nigh.

Dread o' bein' forced to wed one o' these beggar-men was in the heart o' Morna, but she raised her head bravely, an' called on Taig to show his gift. So he knelt down and whispered

a word, an' there on the hard trodden earth o' the court bloomed many gay flowers.

"Go ye within an' wait," says Morna, "while I see yer companions."

So Taig entered the door, feelin' sure o' triumphin'; an' one who had a secret word from the princess brought him a horn o' strong mead.

"'Tis no use at all," whispered the servin' man. "Betther nor that gift has been brought before. But I'll give a gold piece to know the word, for pleasurin' me sweetheart." An' Taig, greedy-like, clutched the gold an' told it. An' at once he was flung out at the little back gate, among the swine-herds.

Next came Derg, leavin' Culain holdin' his horse an' carryin' the sword, forgettin' that the time o' servin' was up. An' Derg whistled—an' from the sky came a hundred singin' birds, twitterin' as in early springtime. So then Morna, fearin' his looks worse nor the other, sent him in afther. An' when he had drunk mead, it went with him as with Taig, for he sold his secret, thinkin' that he'd no chance o'

winnin' Morna whatever—an' was pushed stumblin' out among the pigs.

Last of all Morna looked up an' saw Culain, standin' poorly dressed, but proud an' well to look on.

"Have ye also a gift that no gold can buy?" says she, half tremblin', an' wondherin' at his differin' so from Taig an' Derg.

"Ay," says Culain.

"An' what?" says Morna.

"'Tis the thtrue love of a king's son," says he. Right quick he caught the gladness fillin' her eyes; an' never waitin' for askin', he sprung to the saddle, swung her up before him, an' headed for the outer gate.

"'Tis the beggars' servant stealin' the princess!" shouted those round, tryin' to catch the bridle—but a word to the horse was all that was needed. An' though many a stout fightin' man drew sword an' spear to stay them, Culain was too swift an' skilled with thrust an' parry—an' before any thought to bar the gate, he had cut his path out over warrior an' servin' man, an' was ridin' like the wind over the moorland an' through the forest. An' never did he draw rein

till he reached the castle o' Ciad, an' claimed the kingdom due.

An' happy he lived all his life with Morna, Love o' Sunshine, each havin' that gift which no gold could buy, an' blossomin' flowers an' the singin' o' birds at their will, summer an' winter.

[“An’ that’s how the son o’ Ciad learned the thrue worth o’ bein’ a right king.”]

X

HOW CORMAC LOST HIS KINGDOM

[“Another? An’ one with fightin’ in it? Ah—h, now, ’tis little small girls should take shame for likin’ to hear o’ such matthers! Not but what there was a power o’ battlin’ in those days; an’ men strivin’ to see which was sthonger, an’ often settin’ crafty wits against stouter arms nor their own. Wait, now, while I tell yees how King Cormac was afther losin’ his kingdom.”]

CORMAC o’ Straight Words they called him, for ’twas never a lie nor a thrick he’d stand from any that came in his way; an’ he’d never shrink back from his word once given. ’Twas ruler of a fine share o’ the land he was, lyin’ well up to the north o’ the Sea o’ Moyle. An’ by that raison his coasts were aisy an’ open to the

long ships o' the Northmen, that came from the islands over an' toward the mainland. How an' ever 'twas, though, there'd never been a time when he'd not beaten them off an' them glad o' their lives to get away.

A gran' sstrong man he was, an' ever in the foremost where throuble was brewin'; an' then 'twas "look out!" for other men (though never was Cormac known to harm one weaker nor himself by way o' showin' his power).

An' three fine lads he had,—right sons o' his house, barrin' they were not yet grown to age for handlin' bow nor spear. But well were they afther showin' the marks o' the race they came of, that was bold warriors clear back to nobody knows—an' the times o' Fin-mac-Cool—not alone through Cormac, but by way o' Muireall, their mother, that was no more livin'.

Now when all had been quiet an' peaceable along the coasts for a year or two, an' all in the land was thrivin', word came in on the wind that Haco, the fiercest chief o' the Northmen, was gatherin' a great fleet, filled with armed fightin' men, to win Cormac's rich kingdom an' hold it for himself. An' great preparin' to

meet him there was, an' gatherin' o' warriors from far off.

Sure, Cormac made scant doubt o' dhrivin' them back like straws blowin' before the tempest; yet for care o' the chancin' o' war he sent the three sons o' him, that was wild already to stay by him through the battle, far south to a little huntin' lodge by the Lough o' the Eagle, where neither Dane or man o' the North Islands knew the road to follow; thinkin' himself free to fight strronger with them out o' reach.

An' a great campin' place was made on the plain above the sea, an' watchers a many had piles o' wood laid for firin' on the hilltops, to give word o' the comin' o' the Northmen if 'twas by night. Then Cormac, seein' that all was ready, an' in wait, swore a strrong vow on his sword, an' sent word o' that same to Haco, by a sure messenger.

For three days an' three more came wind from the south, an' no word o' the Northmen. Sure, 'twas fair reckless Cormac was growin', for weariness o' waitin'; an' bein' unable to take sleepin' aisy, there came an hour o' the night when he wandhered up over the downs

an' into the forest, near to the Glen o' Yew Trees. An' few men o' those parts cared to be neighbour to that same, knowin' it for the home o' the Little People, an' dreadin' the wrath an' punishin' o' Cormac, that had made pact with them that no man o' his should be afther disturbin' them by day or night.

So Cormac, fearin' naught, was walkin' slow under the trees, keepin' ever a ready ear for any stirrin', when sudden before him glimmered a wee light, an' there on the brown pine needles strewin' the ground before him stood the Little Green King, noddin' to him in greetin'.

" 'Tis yer friend I am, Cormac," says he, "an' 'tis wise ye'll be to heed the counsellin' I've in me heart for ye; for if ye scorn it, evil will come in an hour that's on its road to ye, an' evil that no power o' mine may ward from ye."

"Can we not beat off all that come by strength of our own arms, then?" asked Cormac, brave-hearted whatever happened.

"Ay, when the time is ripe," says the Little Green King. "But evil is in the wind that is turnin' from south to north before its right hour—bringin' the ships o' Haco in the days

when fortune an' the trolls may be afther favourin' them. Sure, for two days in each year the power o' the Little People goes from them, an' their goodwill profits naught to their friends till those hours be passed. Hearken to me, Cormac, father an' son o' kings. Ye've sworn a pact with me, that none o' yer people shall speak ill o' mine, or harm our grass rings in the deep o' the forest, or dig about our mounds; an' well have ye kept that same."

"Ay," says Cormac, "that have I done, an' will while life is in me, for thrue friend o' mine have ye been—sendin' harvest betther nor any in lands far or near, an' fair days an' sunshine. An' when 'twas rare huntin' I was afther wantin', the deer an' wild fowl were fair eager to run an' fly in me path."

An' again he gave his word, swearin' on the crossed staff an' serpent.

Then says the Little Green King: "For that shall ye keep favour o' the Little People, whether yer kingdom last or fall from ye. An' for that do I give ye wise counsel, that may save all yet. Wait ye in the forest, dhrawin' yer men into hidin' in the glens for but two days, an' let

the Northmen search as they will, growin' careless. In the third day shall ye rise an' dhrive them into the sea ; an' victory shall ye have, that none callin' them kin shall dare come afther for revengin'."

"Nay," says Cormac, "that is ill counsel to a king an' a warrior. On the shore will I meet with Haco, come he by night or day, in fair sunlight or grey tempest."

" 'Tis but waitin' for the third day, an' masthery sure afther," says the Little Green King.

" 'Tis but breakin' me word given," says Cormac. An' for all the persuadin' talk o' the little man, no other answer would he give.

Then says the little king, seein' that naught would move him whatever: "Hear me last word, Cormac, that may soon be without a kingdom. Do no ill to the ships o' Haco till ye have him conquered by land. While they lie on the shore the Danes will know that there's a way o' retreatin' open, an' they may take it an' fly when Haco is never thinkin'. But if the ships be burned an' broken, then will the fury o' madmen an' the power o' the trolls come in their

blood, an' none can resist their on settin'. An' no strength will I have to aid ye in that hour."

" 'Tis no aid I'm askin'," says Cormac.

"Then on ye I lay three *geasa*," says the Little Green King (an' those same were spells that Cormac couldn't help obeyin'). "First, that ye suffer no man save freeborn warriors in yer camp. Second, that ye carry in yer belt these three darts, keepin' them for the hour when the battle turns against yees. 'Twas forged by Lén they were, an' under the rainbow were they tempered, that no armour can stay them. A score o' men shall fall where one flies. Use two as need comes, but hold back the third for yer darkest hour, ever mindin' that 'tis the last, an' none to follow afther. An' the third is this, Cormac that scorns aidin', that ye sthrip the jerkin from the first man ye kill, an' wear it above yer own."

With that word he was gone from seein', like the starlight glimmer on a knife, an' Cormac, grippin' fast the three darts o' Lén, hastened back to his men, seein' far in the sky to the north the light o' the burnin' signals. An' before

night was gone, he had sent far from his camp all that were not warriors born o' free blood.

Now as day came out o' the dark, down the north-east wind came rushin' the long ships o' Haco, with black sails showin' far against the white foamin' waves, an' shields glitterin' along the sides o' them. An' right at the shore they headed, dhrivin' far up on the sand with the risin' tide.

Then, with a great cryin' out, Cormac an' his men swept down along the cliff-side, the sun glissenin' on their bronze armour an' rich tores o' gold, an' the ash shafts whirrin' ahead to let Haco know what was comin'. Sure, the battle-axes swung under the blue o' the cold sky, an' there was clashin' o' swords an' spears, an' wild strugglin' for masthery up an' down the sand, where none heeded the splashin' o' waves about their feet, nor the tanglin' o' the salt grass.

An' from the first man slain by Cormac, he sthripped the green coat that he wore, never carin' for the wondherin' o' those nigh, but puttin' it on over his armour; an' all through

the fightin' the sight of it made the men o' Cormac wild for followin'.

As dark dhrew on, the Danes an' men o' the islands were forced back across the bulwarks o' their ships for shelter; an' Cormac, with his warriors (an' fresh they were still, for all the heat o' their fightin'), went back to the shadow o' the cliffs an' built fires for the night. But Cormac set watchers to see that no surprise came to those sleepin', an' himself kept guard, foremost of all, knowin' Haco an' his men to be full o' cunnin' not to be thought light of. Yet had he feelin' o' triumphin' because he'd beaten them back without aidin' from the Little People, for all the Danes outnumbered his own men.

And that no plannin' o' his should go strayin', he called aside Cogoran an' Duach, that were chiefs under him, tellin' them the words o' the Little Green King. An' they three shaped out together how the battle should be at the hour o' dawn, catchin' the men o' Haco asleep. An' while the words were still in the air, there came a rustlin' o' dead leaves behind a great oak, that had fallen in a winter storm long past. Quick they sprang to see who'd been listenin', an'

Cogoran leaned over an' dragged out a little bent man, blinkin' an' rubbin' his eyes in the glare o' the fire.

" 'Twas hearkenin' he was," says Duach, fierce an' angry.

"Nay," whispered the little sstrange man. " 'Tis from the ships o' Haco I come. A man o' these parts I am, taken prisoner in an old raid, an' this night I slipped off the ship when none saw me, an' here to cry to Cormac for freein'. Forbye bein' weary from toilin' at the oar, I fell to sleepin' in the leaves, and heard naught till this warrior gripped me."

"Were ye born free warrior?" asked Cogoran.

"Ay, that I was," says the crooked one.

"An' what man's man were ye?" asked Cormac.

"The man o' no man," says the other. An' then Cormac looked closer, an' knew him to be one that had come to serve him in early days; the son of a poor kerne he was.

"Is not yer name Keir?" he asked.

"Ay," says the man.

"Then well I mind ye," says Cormac. "No

free-born warrior are ye, but a servin' man, an' son o' Barach, that was bondman to King Aodh, me father. Here can ye not bide, for all save men o' free blood will bring ill fortune to the day comin'. Take food, what ye will, an' go yer way into the forest till the battlin' be over." An' Keir, hatin' him for his words, crept away without more speakin', an' quiet through the bushes, an' down the cliff-side to where the fightin' had been that day.

Now on the ship o' Haco was anger an' deep dhrinkin', an' great boastin' o' what would be done next day; but Haco stood on the deck forward, lookin' at the darkenin' cliffs, an' thinkin' o' bein' king in room o' Cormac, that had strhuck down more nor a score o' his men that day. An' as it grew late, there was a small bent man crept up to him, comin' out o' the shadows.

"What will ye give if I show ye the road to beat down Cormac?" asked he.

"Yer freedom an' land o' yer own," says Haco, laughin' in his yellow beard at the wizened face o' him.

"Then is the payment mine," says Keir. Ah—h, but an evil snake o' the earth was that

same, knowin' his own countrry-side as he did; for all the plannin' o' Cormac an' the counsel o' the Little Green King did he tell to Haco, offerin' to guide him unbeknownst to a road up the glens, an' bethrayin' those o' his own birth-land into the clutches o' the Danes.

"An' 'tis meself that has not forgot the day when Cormac had me whipped for mistreatin' a servin' lad!" says Keir. "Now 'tis me hour for payin' him."

"Ay," says Haco, "but first shall ye dress as a free warrior o' Cormac's men; fight or be afther seemin' to fight in his ranks, that ye bring him ill fortune; an' lead me men to the Glen o' Yew Trees."

An' Keir, tremblin' for what might come, dared say naught against it.

Then Haco fell to chucklin' in his beard. "'Tis plain what is the wise road for us," says he. An' straight he went to the men commandin' the other ships, an' together they laid plot to break holes in the boards o' the ships when the fightin' had begun; an' to dhrive the men o' Cormac toward the Glen o' Yew Trees, forcin' them to gain the ill-will o' the Little People

(barrin' none save Keir knew where that glen lay).

'Twasn't half o' no time before all were on foot again; an' the Danes kept well together an' pushed for the top o' the cliffs. But sure, Cormac was ready there in the faint dawnin' light, waitin' to give them such welcome as they'd never tasted. An' while on the day before had been shoutin' an' wild calls, now was scarce a sound beyant the sword-strokes an' whirr o' flyin' arrows among the oaks.

Two times were the men o' Cormac pressed back by Haco, an' both times Cormac, speedin' one o' the darts o' Lén, sthruck down the fiercest o' those before him, whirlin' them apart like an eddy o' wind in a pile o' dhry leaves, an' the Danes fell away in turn. At last Haco, growin' impatient, gave signal to those at the ships; an' in a flash o' time a great hole was stove in each bow, so that they'd float no more.

'Twas growin' toward night, an' when the Danes heard the crashin' o' the axes on the wood, an' knew what had passed, they thought it the work o' the men o' Cormac. Like wild boars at bay they turned an' flung themselves

against the spears an' swords o' their foemen, without waitin' command from Haco; an' so close were they all together, that there was no space for ddrawin' bow.

An' now Keir, that had been waitin' his time an' keepin' out o' danger behind the warriors o' Cormac, slipped by an' pointed out to Haco where was the Glen o' Yew Trees, fearin' goin' too nigh it himself. An' Haco, ddrawin' off a score o' his best warriors, drove the mass o' battlin' men little by little toward it, pressin' an' urgin' them ever onward; while others, comin' fresh from the ships, reached the main body that was thryin' to seize Cormac, an' gave them new strength.

All at once it flashed on the thought o' Cormac what was bein' done, an' he felt the last dart burn hot in his hand. Ay, though he'd been fightin' like a right hero as he was, he was nigh to bein' overpowered, while the feet o' his strug-glin' men were already at the head o' the forbidden glen, without any seein' where they were goin'. Scarce a minute had he for choosin' between his honour's sake an' his own freedom, but his given word was sthrong in his heart, an'

the dart flew whistlin' far from him, sthrikin' in the heart o' the battle, an' breakin' down great trees that choked up the mouth o' the glen so that none could reach it. An' under all was Keir, havin' received his freedom an' the land on which he lay, rewardin' him for bein' a thraitor. Sure, he never knew what had given him his death-blow.

Then as the Danes, seein' Cormac unarmed, rushed on him with a great cry o' triumph, the sun sank out o' sight behind the mountains an' he was gone from their eyes. An' where they'd been sthrikin' at a sthrong warrior in a jerkin o' green, sure they found their darts an' axes buried deep in an old mossgrown log. An' all that night they searched in vain for him, far an' wide.

But Cormac, never knowin' how it came, opened his eyes as if wakin' from sleep, an' saw himself to be lyin' on the shore o' the Lough o' the Eagle, with the sunrise touchin' the hilltops around, the warm wind bringin' the song o' birds in place o' the battle-cries that had been ringin' in his ears, an' by him standin' the Little Green King.

“Where’s me kingdom?” cried Cormac, gettin’ on his feet, half mazed.

“Lost an’ gone by the choice ye made,” says the other. “Against yer given word ye set it, an’ the word was sstronger, an’ won. Cormac without a Kingdom are ye, but great favour o’ the Little People shall be to ye an’ yer sons afther, to honour the word of a thtrue man.”

“But me good fightin’ men!” cried Cormac. “Naught was me kingdom to me in worth, beside the warriors who stood battlin’ for me like thtrue brothers. Never would I have left them to be slain without me sharin’ their fate.”

“Aisy now,” says the Little King, laughin’ at his own thought. “Ne’er one is harmed or left-to be slave to Haco. Many a day may the North-men search, but naught will they find save the bones of a thraitor. An’ though Haco hunt long an’ weary days for the men o’ Cormac, far off in countrries beyant pursuin’ are they an’ theirs—an’ much renown shall they win. An’ while Haco an’ his men hold the ground on which they tread, yet a waste shall it grow, with neither harvestin’ nor huntin’ for their needs

till the day when the last Dane leaves the Little People masthers o' the land.

“Not even meself could aid ye till sunset o' the day o' the weakness o' me people; but rulers o' men shall yer sons be in the end, an' strength an' swiftness beyant that of other men shall be for ye an' for them afther, while wearin' the green jerkin in which ye fought for me—thrown' the last dart o' Lén without carin' for yer own danger.”

So King Cormac—that was Cormac without a Kingdom, through keepin' faith with the Little People that trusted him, an' through holdin' fast to his word given—went in to his own in the rough huntin' lodge, an' lived there content to the end o' his life. An' never was a greater hunter, nor one swifter, nor a man sthonger. An' his honour—held fair at a heavy price—was a word for rememberin' many a year afther, even in far lands.

XI

WIND AN' WAVE AN' WANDHERIN' FLAME

[“ ‘Tis mindin’ somethin’ that happened far an’ back o’ the times o’ the Little People I am. Sure, ‘tis meself had nigh on forgot it entirely, but when all’s quiet I’ll be afther tellin’ it.”]

THERE was always battlin’ somewhere, back in those days; an’ heroes that fought with sword an’ spear—forged far up an’ under the rainbow by Lén the Smith, that was mighty in all sorts o’ wisdom.

Now one time he was beatin’ out a great shield o’ gold; an’ ‘twas wrought so cunnin’ that who turned it over an’ laid it on the wather could step on it an’ sail where he would. An’ for a device on it he made roses o’ the fine gold, raised far out from it, as they’d been growin’

right there. Almost they seemed wavin' in the wind.

An' as he came to sthrikin' the last blows, his hand slipped, an' his great hammer went flyin' downward through the air; an' his cry o' command sent ringin' afther it was too late to hindher.

Now 'twas about toward sunset, an' the waves were beatin' high an' wild afther storm on the west coast, that Artân, son o' Duallach, that was a king's son, was huntin' along the shore. All day he'd been tryin' to keep from the company o' Myrdú, his half-brother, but only by now had he shaken him off; an' he was runnin' swiftly, for gladness o' bein' alone with the breeze an' the flyin' spray.

Just as the sinkin' sun touched the sea, he heard the great cryin'-out o' Lén, out o' the North, an' looked up into the deep sky. An' there he saw, whirlin' down toward him, some-thin' first dark an' then bright. Not a fearin' thought was in him; an' as it came nigh he sprang with hand stretched out an' caught it—just savin' it from bein' buried in the beach sand.

The force of its fallin' sent him to his knees, but in a breath he was on his feet again, lookin' at what he held. Sure, 'twas nothin' less than a great hammer, glowin' an' darkenin' by turns, as there had been livin' fire within it.

"What 'n ever are ye, then?" cried Artân, out o' the surprise, never thinkin' on gettin' an answer. Yet thtrue an' at once came a whisperin' like wind in pine forests far off—

"The hammer o' Lén."

"An' how'll I get ye back to him, not knowin' where to find him?" asked Artân. "Sure, the winds must rise up an' blow me to the end o' the rainbow, where he sits, or I'll never get there at all."

The words were scarce past his lips when down across the hills came a warm gust o' south wind—the last o' the storm—an' caught him up, still clingin' to the hammer, an' swept him upwards till he could see naught for mist an' hurryin' clouds. Then came a feelin' o' sinkin', an' a sudden jar; an' there he was standin' on green turf, lookin' at white mountains, risin' higher nor aught he'd seen, an' between him an' them

shimmered the rainbow itself, glowin' all colours in the light o' sunset.

“Ay, ‘tis aisy seein’ where I am,” laughed Artân, startin’ toward it bravely.

For a while he went on, an’ at last he came nigh enough to see the mighty shape o’ Lén, standin’ waitin’ at his forge. An’ while night was fast comin’ on, an’ the stars showin’ out in the sky over all, yet the sun-fire was still flamin’ up in his smithy, workin’ his will at a word.

If fear had had place in the heart of Artân, then was time for it, when he saw the deep eyes o’ Lén, like dark sea-water in caves, lookin’ far an’ through him. But never had that come to him, an’ without speakin’ he raised the hammer toward the strrong knotted hand that claimed it.

“Whist, then!” says Lén, graspin’ it quick for fear the metal was coolin’. “Say naught till I’m done!” With that he beat an’ turned the shield, an’ gave the endin’ touches to it. Then, with another big shout, he hung it on the rainbow, flashin’ an’ shinin’ till men on earth below saw it for Northern Lights in the night sky.

"How came ye here in me forge, Artân, son o' Duallach?" he cried.

"That I know not," spoke out Artân. "When I held yon hammer in hand, an' cried on the wind for blowin' me to him that owned it—for no other road there was for returnin' it—the warm blast came out o' the south an' caught me up here."

"Ay," laughed Lén, deep an' hearty. "The winds are at the will o' him that handles it; but too great a power is that to be given careless to mortal man. What reward will ye have, now? Whether gold, or power above other men, or the fairest o' maids for yer wife?"

Then the blood reddened the face of Artân.

"Naught care I for gold," says he. "An' power over men should be for him that wins it fair."

"Then 'tis the fairest o' maids ye'll be afther wantin'?" asked Lén. "Have ye seen such a one?"

"Nay," says Artân. "Dark are the faces in the house o' Duallach, an' little to me likin'."

"Then shall ye have one fair as day," says Lén. He turned to where the shield was hangin',

an' from the heart o' that same he plucked a rose o' the beaten gold, an' gave it to Artân.

"Cast it in the sea surf at sunrise," says he, "callin' 'Darthuil!'-then shall ye have yer reward. But one thing mind. Safely yer own is she not till first lost an' won back. When ye know not where to seek aid in searchin', cry on me name at the seacoast, an' aid will there be for ye if ye come not too late—wind, wave, an' wandherin' flame. Never does Lén forget. Hold fast yer rose."

As he spoke, again came a gale, chill from the north this time, an' whirled Artân past cloud an' above surgin' seas, an' left him on the hilltop above the beach at the last hour before the dawnin'.

Quick Artân hastened down the cliff, still graspin' the golden rose, an' stood where the little small waves curled over the stones, waitin' for the first gleam o' the sun to touch the sea. Hours it seemed to him, but minutes it was in truth, before he caught a long breath, raised the rose high in air, an' tossed it swift an' sure into the snowy crest of a green incomin' wave.

“Darthuil!” he cried, an’ the cliff echo made a song of it.

As the drops flew upward in the red dawn an’ the breaker swept in, there by his side stood a maid with the gold o’ the rose in her hair, an’ the white o’ sea-foam in her fair skin, an’ the colour o’ the sunrise in lips an’ cheek. Blither nor spring, he caught her hand an’ led her over the hills to the house o’ Duallach, they two singin’ for joy o’ livin’ as they went.

Now not long had the two been wed (an’ welcome were they under the roof of Duallach), when Myrdú, that was half-brother to Artán, but older nor him, came back from far huntin’, ill-pleased at missin’ Artán for his companion, an’ for helpin’ him carry the red deer he’d shot.

“ ‘Tis an ill youth,” says he, “an’ will get no good from lyin’ on the cliff edge an’ lettin’ the hunt go by.”

“Nay,” says Duallach, slow to anger. “Fair fortune has he won, an’ the favour o’ the gods; an’ has brought home a bride, fair as the sun at noon.”

Then was Myrdú half ragin’ from bein’ jealous; but not wishin’ to show that same, he called

for meat an' dhrink to be brought him in the great hall. An' Artân, wishin' to be friendly like, cried out for Darthuil to serve his brother. Sure, when Myrdu saw her comin' toward him—shinin' among the dark lasses o' Duallach's household like a star in the night sky—fury was in his heart for thinkin' that Artân, bein' younger nor him, had won what he had not, an' soon he laid plans for stealin' her from his brother.

'Twas not many days before word o' this came to the ear o' Duallach; an' he, hatin' strife, bade Artân an' Darthuil take horse an' ride swiftly southward to the Lough o' the Lone Valley, to dwell on the little island in it till evil wishes had passed from the heart o' Myrdu. So Artân, mindin' what Lên had foretold, yet thinkin' it wiser not to be afther losin' Darthuil at all, rode away with her on his left hand when Myrdu was sleepin' an' not knowin' what was bein' done.

When he roused an' found them gone, an' that none o' the house would say whither, he was in a fine passion; but he made as if he was afther goin' huntin', an' took his two fierce hounds an'

went off to trace the road they'd taken. An' sure enough, 'twas not many hours before he was on their path.

Now safer would it have been had Artân told Darthuil the full raison why he was takin' her far into the shelter o' forest an' lough o' the wilderness; but she, trustin' him, asked naught, thinkin' no evil o' livin' man. So scarce had Artân left her in the low cabin on the island an' gone off to hunt, than Myrdu pushed through the bushes, leavin' the hounds on the shore behind, an' floated himself out to the island on a couple o' logs lashed with a thong o' deer-skin. Ay, but Darthuil was startled, not dhreamin' why he'd come.

“ 'Tis Artân is hurt, an' afther sendin' me for ye,” says Myrdu, lookin' down unaisy like, from not wishin' to meet the rare clear eyes o' her. “ Come, an' I'll take ye where he lies.”

Not waitin' a moment was Darthuil, then, but hurried doin' as she was bid, never thinkin' what evil might be in store.

Afther a few hours Artân came back through the trees, an' game a plenty he'd found. He pulled out his boat o' skins, an' quick paddled

back to the island. But there he found no Darthuil; no, nor any sign o' her save the little print o' her sandal by the wather's edge.

Then came to his mind the promise o' Lén. Never darin' to waste an hour searchin' by himself, he ferried his horse across to the mainland, mounted, an' pushed for the sea. Never once did he stop for restin' till he was standin' where the waves beat over him, where he had cried on Darthuil, an' she had come to him.

“Lén!” he called. “Yer aidin’, Lén! Darthuil is stolen from me.”

There came a rumblin’ o’ thunder, an’ on the shore stood a great figure, like a pillar o’ cloud reachin’ half to the sky.

“Never safe yer own till lost an’ found, I said,” came the deep voice. “Now I give ye wild servants, a wind an’ a wave an’ a wandlerin’ flame for helpin’ ye to bring her safe again. Mind well that each will obey ye but once, so call on them only when yer sharpest need comes. When ye’ve again set the feet o’ Darthuil safe in the hall o’ Duallach, none can take her from ye more. Now follow yer love.

'Tis to the Northland has Myrdú carried her.
Let him not pass the White Rocks, or wind an'
wave an' flame will lose power to aid ye. Use
yer wit, now, an' use it well."

Artán would have spoken to thank him, but with the last word Lén was no more there; so he mounted again an' turned to the north; an' behind him came the wind, whisperin', over the grass; an' the wave, runnin' up the sthream near at hand; an' the flame, creepin' among dhry leaves, but settin' fire to naught else, its time not bein' come.

Together they all thravelled the betther part of a long day, an' late on Artán saw dust risin' ahead. 'Twas a cloud that Myrdú had raised to hide the way he was goin', an' beyant it he was ridin', carrying Darthuil before him on his saddle o' skins, with the two hounds lopin' along beside to fright her from tryin' to escape, an' to give warnin' of any followin'; while not many miles ahead were the White Rocks, that he was pushin' to reach.

On hurried Artán, but his horse was wearied, an' little head could he make. Moreover, the

cloud o' dust left him uncertain o' what was hid. So he thought well, an' chose wind to serve him first.

"Go on, an' blow the dust far away, whisperin' courage to Darthuil the while," says he. An' at once the wind sped far ahead, obeyin' his command. When the two dogs felt it touch them, they cowered low; but Darthuil took heart, knowin' that help was at hand. An' the dust was no more hidin' her from Artān, so she waved her hand an' called aloud to him to ride in haste.

Then Myrdú, fearin' that he might yet lose her, threw a handful o' twigs behind him in the road; an' fallin' they turned into dead trees, stoppin' the way on all sides. But Artān well knew the way to clear his path.

"Go forward!" he cried to the wandherin' flame, "an' leave not a trace o' them!" As he spoke, the flame swept up high in air, roarin' an' smokin'; an' in half an instant naught remained o' the logs but a pile o' smouldherin' ashes. But still was Myrdú fast nearin' his goal, an' had one thing more for helpin'.

He dropped a little sharp knife in the roadway; an' as it fell, it cut into the dust, an' there opened a wide, terrible chasm, not to be crossed by horse nor man. Then Artân grew clear desperate.

"Wave!" he shouted, "bring Darthuil to me!"

Up then it rose, rollin' forward like floodtide in spring; an' it filled the gulf, an' swept away dogs an' horse an' Myrdu himself, that none were heard of from that on; but Darthuil it floated gentle like, as she had been a tuft o' thistle-down, back to Artân, waitin' for her.

He caught her an' clasped her close, an' turned his horse, an' never halted till he led her safe into the hall o' Duallach, where none might steal her from him again. An' there they lived happy all their lives.

But as for the wind an' the wave an' the wandherin' flame, so sweet an' fair was Darthuil that ne'er would they go from her to return to Lén. To the last o' her life the wind blew soft for her when 'twas overly hot elsewhere, an' clear cool wather flowed up from the

ground to save her dhrawin' any from the river,
an' fire burned bright on her hearth without
need o' plenishin'; an' all that for the love o'
Darthuil, that was made by Lēn out o' the foam
tossed by the wind from the sea-wave, an' the
wandherin' flame o' the sunrise.

XII

GRAINNE THE HAUGHTY

[“Naught but a bit o’ dhry bread, was it, ye were castin’ away? When there’s birds an’ little fishes ’ud be glad of it? Some day ye may go wantin’ it! Hear how one prouder nor ye was afther learnin’ a lesson not to be slightin’ the like!”]

FAIR an’ tall was Grainne, with shinin’ dark eyes that were seldom soft in smilin’, or even seemin’ so much as to see the poor by the roadside an’ at the gates. Riches had she, an’ many a thing to be proud about, by an’ beyant the bein’-sister to Ruadan Mor, that was a mighty sthrong chieftain. Far up on a broad hill-plain was his dûn; an’ treasures a plenty had he won in battle, makin’ a name for himself by land an’ sea. Many a brave champion came thinkin’ to win Grainne, as she sat high among her servin’

maids, in Dûn-glas, spinnin' the white wool with her distaff o' gold, but cool greetin' had she for the best o' them.

Now on a fair spring day, when the world was goin' well,—'twas Ruadan Mor was afther bringin' Finola, that was the daughter to King Ferdoragh, back to Dûn-glas for his wife. A gay train was that came ridin' with her; warriors in silk o' scarlet, an' laughin' girls in white an' green an' gold, on horses shod with silver; an' back o' them all, an' around, came stout fightin' men in ringmail, carryin' spears an' swords o' wrought bronze, for guardin' the princess an' the rest.

Sure, Grainne met them with welcome, an' had a great feast spread in the hall, to do honour to Ruadan Mor an' his bride; an' for seven days there were fine rejoicin's, through all Dûn-glas an' the countrry round. More nor one o' the heroes from King Ferdoragh's court looked long at Grainne the Haughty, but naught lay in her heart for any man o' them, barrin' 'twas thoughts o' bein' too high for him.

“Why will ye not make choice o' these?” asked Finola, gentle like. “Sthrong champions

an' sons o' kings are Niall an' Kermad an' Tuathall mac Osra. Many a fair maid in King Ferdoragh's court would be glad o' that ye're turnin' from."

"Ay, then," says Grainne, with flashin' light in her eyes, "for why was it no man o' them that *ye* chose? Bettier to be sister o' Ruadan Mor, nor wife to a weaker man!" An' Finola could set no word against that, at all, for laughin' an' thinkin' the same to herself.

Now on the mornin' o' the seventh day 'twas ridin' out for far huntin' they were, with horses an' hounds an' a golden horn to each. An' as they came through the gate, Tuathall, bein' in haste to push ahead where Grainne was ridin', sthruck against an old crone that was limpin' along, an' sent her down in the roadway. Niall, seein' an' pityin', but not darin' to wait, for fear Tuathall should be forehand with him, turned his horse, not to graze her, tossed her a bit o' silver, an' galloped on. But Kermad, that was youngest o' the three, leapt from his horse an' set her on her feet.

She shook her withered hand at Tuathall—as he went, never lookin' back—sayin', "Ye

shall seek for that ye're followin', an' never come nigh it!" An' afther Niall she cried, "Many a day shall ye pass by what ye most desire, never knowin' it!" But on Kermad she looked different like, an' says she, "In the end shall ye win what's in yer heart!"

Kermad, laughin' an' light-heart, rode off afther the hunt; but says one that Grainne had spoke sharp to, "Scant good will it be to him to be winnin' Grainne the Haughty, that's in his heart the now! Bitther proud is she to all beneath her, holdin' herself higher nor kings' sons!"

"Is she that?" says the crone. "Then 'tis for me to be doin' me part!" An' she was gone from sight like a whiff o' smoke.

Now at first Grainne rode by Finola, in mornin' sunlight that came through the trees an' caught the dew on the hillside grass; but afther a bit, wearyin' o' havin' Kermad an' the others near, she waited till all were bendar' forward to look at a spotted fawn; an' then, turnin' the head o' her black horse, she was off like light, down a deep glen, no one seein' her go.

Down an' on she pushed, by an' beside the

little small sthream that went laughin' through the glen; an' while with one soft white hand she was keepin' her horse in the way she chose, swingin' from the other was the huntin' horn. Afther a while or two, when she'd nigh on forgot those in the forest above her, a thicket o' nut bushes barred the way, an' only by walkin' to the bed o' the sthream could she make her way through them. The stiff branches would ha' thrust her back, but never was Grainne one to be turned from a path once taken, an' she pressed on till she came out on the plain, far from any parts she'd ever seen. An' 'twas far past noon, for shadows were fallin' eastward.

Lookin' back, up the far mountain side, she could make out no way o' returnin', for the runnin' wather had been lost in the nut-thicket, an' tangled boughs o' bushes hid the way she'd come. A wide, lonely plain was here, with no sound o' birds singin' or trees rustlin' in the wind; an' sudden wishin' she'd been less headstrong leavin' the hunt, Grainne put the golden horn to her lips an' blew a long blast. But waverin' it echoed, an' no answer came, for all her waitin' an' hearkenin'.

Sure, then was no soft feelin' in her mind for Niall an' Kermad an' those others, but rather dark anger, blamin' them for her plight. Hot with so much as havin' let them be in her thought, she held her head high an' looked round, near an' far, searchin' for sight of any that might guide her into beaten thrack, but nowhere was sign o' livin' soul. So not knowin' what other to do, she set off toward what seemed like a mound she'd once passed when ridin' eastward from Dûn-glas. 'Twas bad goin' undher foot, with hidden bog-holes to be watchin' for; but while hunger was makin' her keen to be reachin' shelter an' food, yet each step made the land seem more lonesome.

Well, when she'd gone a good arrow-shot, she saw, off to the left, in a sort o' clear spot, a low round hut o' woven reeds an' clay, an' quick she bent her way toward that same. As she came nigh, peerin' out o' the door was the head of a wrinkled old crone, lookin' scowlin' at her.

"What will ye be afther learnin' o' me?" asked the old woman, never stirrin'. "The work o' the poor?"

"Work? An' learnin'?" cried Grainne.

“What should ye be teachin’ me, forbye ‘tis the path to Dûn-glas! Come out, while I speak with ye!”

The crone hobbled out o’ the low door, muttherin’ to herself,—an’ came beside the horse. “ ‘Tis a far cry to Dûn-glas,” says she. “Betther for ye to be restin’ yer horse, before goin’ on.”

Grainne shook her head. “That will I not!” she cried. “So far has he come, an’ back shall he take me. Rest can he have in Dûn-glas, where is a fitter place for him nor this.”

Grainne turned eyes on her, as if that same had been honourin’ dust beneath her feet. “Bring me food an’ dhrink,” she ordhered. “Naught have I tasted since early dawn.” But when the crone came tottherin’ back with muddy wather in a dhrinkin’ shell, an’ a broken cake o’ coarse ground barley meal, dark an’ hard, ’twas angered Grainne was. She supped a dhrift or two of the wather, bein’ sore parched from the sun; but when she took the crust in her hand, ’twas not she would be bringin’ it to her lips.

“Is it the like o’ that ye’d be offerin’ to the

sister o' Ruadan Mor," says she, "that has never eaten aught poorer nor white bread o' the fine wheat? If ye've naught fit for eatin', point out me road an' let me be goin'!" an' she flung the crust into the muddy pool beside her.

The old crone caught up the bread an' wiped it, keepin' it in her brown withered hand, an' lookin' at Grainne with fear-givin' eyes as she spoke: "Grainne the Haughty may ye be,—sister to a great warrior, an' sought o' princes that know not the hard heart o' ye,—but by the food that would ha' fed me, that ye cast into mud an' foul wather when 'twas offered to yer need an' hunger, never shall ye go free till ye've paid the score by givin' me—here in me hand—barley bread o' yer own plantin' an' reapin', grindin' an' bakin'!"

An' while Grainne was yet starin' at her, the crone whispered a sthrong spell into the palm o' that hand, an' touched the horse with it, an' then threw the dhrops from the dhrinkin' shell over Grainne. Sure, in a flash there was no horse there at all, but Grainne was standin' on the bog turf, scarce believin' but what all was an evil dhream.

“Where’s me horse?” says she.

“Far an’ away in Dûn-glas! Go in the hut!” says the old woman, as she had been mistress o’ many.

“That will I not!” cried Grainne again. “Ye’ve no power for keepin’ me here! ‘Tis Ruadan Mor will be sendin’ out men for seekin’ me, through all the land, an’ a sore punishin’ will be for ye!”

“Nay!” says the other, with a sneerin’ laugh. “Naught will they be findin’ o’ Grainne the Haughty!”

“Naught?” cried out Grainne, the fire-gleam in her eyes.

“If ye doubt, look ye in the pool. What ye see in it shall all see that come askin’!” An’ Grainne, glancin’ against her will into the pool o’ dark, still wather, saw nothin’ at all but the reflectin’ o’ two white hands. Not so much as the shadow o’ herself was lyin’ in the sunway across it!

Now back in Dûn-glas all were standin’ in the courtyard or watchin’ from the tops o’ the walls, for hours had gone by, an’ all were in from the huntin’ save Lady Grainne, though

men mounted an' afoot had been sent scourin' the hill-glens for sign o' her. An' even as they talked, Finola gave a cry, an' there in the gate stood Grainne's horse, none havin' seen how it came.

" 'Tis the dark powers have stolen her away!" says Finola; an' many thought the same.

"Then shall they bring her again!" says Tuathall mac Osra. " 'Tis meself will search for her a month before givin' up hope o' findin' her,—ay, an' weddin' her."

"A month?" says Niall. " 'Tis for a year an' a week an' a day I'll be afther bindin' meself to keep on seekin', an' feel paid by a kiss o' the hand o' fair Grainne."

But says Kermad: "If I find her not in a month, for a year will I search an' for ten years, an' while the life stirs me heart,—askin' only the hope o' bringin' smilin' to the dark eyes o' Grainne."

So over the mountain sides they sought her, an' through deep glens, an' to every rath an' dún, hut an' grianan, for long leagues, trusted men went for askin' word an' for tracin' out

where Grainne might be hid. An' many a night that followed saw them draggin' weary feet back to Dûn-glas without aught o' news. An' Ruadan an' Finola mourned for her as one never to be found more.

Hot summer came, an' Tuathlall, wearyin', rode back over the hills to the court o' Fer-doragh; yet Niall an' Kermad still kept holdin' to hope, while autumn winds were scattherin' dhry leaves here an' there, an' when winter snows covered all.

But when spring days were warm in the land, says Niall to Kermad, ridin' from a far glen toward Dûn-glas: " 'Tis dead she is, or in the land o' the Little People! Home will I be turnin', where are laughin' fair maids a plenty."

"Farewell then," says Kermad.

So Niall spurred away, an' Kermad spurred on slow, thinkin' so deep o' Grainne that he took scant count o' where he was. By an' be-yant, as dusk was nigh, he came to an open space on the hillside, an' slackened rein, that his horse might crop the young grass. Now here in the open, where sun would come, was a

bit o' bare brown earth, as it had been fresh turned up. An' as the horse was movin' by that same, sudden, out o' the air, came two white hands, an' turned his head another way. Sure, Kermad wondered, all amazed. He caught up the reins an' watched, but naught more did he see, barrin' 'twas a swirl o' white mist blown past by a chill wind.

All night, back in Dûn-glas, he couldn't keep those white hands out o' his dhreamin', so like were they to fair ones he'd seen spinnin' white wool from a golden distaff; an' the next evenin' at the same hour, he sought the far clearin' afoot, an' waited, hid by a bush. An' as the sunset light passed from the treetops, out o' mist came the white hands again, graspin' a rough pointed branch an' tryin' to dig up the earth in the open, but seemin' to find it ill work, there among stones an' rocks.

Kermad waited till the hands were blown away by that same cold wind again, an' then dhrew his sword an' fell to diggin' up the patch o' ground with it, an' by dark 'twas turned up for plantin', if that was why 'twas wanted.

Watchin' next evenin' afther that, the hands came, sowin' seed careful, an' coverin' it with earth, an' they bein' drifted away before all was done, 'twas Kermad finished the plantin'.

Sure, while he still kept show o' wandherin' over the country, all his thought was o' the little field beyant, an' the gentle hands that tended it. There he went, time afther time, an' now he'd see them, in the mist, an' then maybe not. However it was, the summer went flittin' by, while he saw the green stalks o' barley shootin' up, there in the forest, an' aided keepin' them from bein' weed-grown, an' brought wather there when was drought for a time.

The ears o' the grain grew ripe an' hard, an' one night o' full moon he saw the white hands pluckin' them, an' rubbin' them to rid the grain o' chaff an' straw. Sudden he began thinkin' that if he was to find where the hands came from, 'twas time, for they might be carryin' away their harvest an' not returnin'. So when he felt the wind, he followed the swirlin' mist down over rocks an' briars an' roots, never carin', an' at last over bog an' marsh, in the

dark o' mist an' fog, to a low hut. An' from the door came an old crone, holdin' a burnin' brand up in the night.

"Finish now yer lesson!" she cried,—an' Kermad, watchin', saw the hands bring out grindin' stones an' crush the grain, an' then pick up sticks an' build a fire. Next, they mixed the meal into a cake, an' set it to bake over the coals, an' as he caught sight o' them clear in the fire-flame, he knew them!

Quick he sprang from his hidin' an' grasped firm hold o' the crone's arm.

"The white hands!" he cried. "'Tis yerself has hidden Lady Grainne, an' shall do it no longer!"

"'Twas learnin' the work o' the poor she was needin,'" mutthered the crone. "What is she to ye, that ye should keep up searchin' for what Ruadan Mor gave up, a year gone by?"

"Dearest of all in me heart!" says Kermad. "Let her free o' yer spells, or ill shall it be for ye!" A step forward he took, in anger, but paused, feelin' the touch o' two soft hands holdin' him back.

"Ay, now that the bakin' is done," says the

old woman, as if not seein' him or carin' what he would do. "Give me here the cake!"

An' in the sayin' of the words, the servin' hands laid the cake in hers. In two pieces she broke it, sayin': "Full half shall be mine, as payin' for that once cast in the mud; an' in the other share lies freein' for the one that planted an' reaped, ground an' baked the barley bread. But hark, now," turnin' to Kermad. "'Twas planted an' grown by helpin' from ye, an' not alone, as right should ha' been. That share I give to ye. Will ye free her by givin' it?"

"Ay!" shouted Kermad, quick snatchin' the broken barley cake from the crone's fingers an' holdin' it out. No swirl o' mist he saw then, but one with soft smilin' eyes, an' willin' hands that were laid in his.

The crone looked at the two standin' there, then whispered a charm in her wrinkled palm an' blew it off into the dark night air, an' all at once 'twas Grainne's own black horse was there by them.

"Learnin' an' winnin' is done!" cried the old woman; an' with that, hut an' crone, mist an' fog an' clouds were gone on a gust o' warm

wind. But open lay path before them, over the plain an' up the mountain glen, an' back to Dûn-glas in clear light o' the full harvest moon rode Kermad an' Grainne—that was no more haughty, havin' learned the work o' the poor.

XIII

LIGHT O' ME EYES

[“A tale, is it? Well, hearken then.”]

’TWAS nigh on the end of a rare fine summer day, an’ a sweet south wind stirred in the boughs o’ the trees at the bend o’ the shore, when Alona, daughter to Fathach the Dhreamer, came down the sea-glen with a leaf-basket o’ red berries in her little hands, that were brown with the sun.

Clad all in a dress o’ fawn-skin she was, an’ had a bow at her back like a right hunter. The sun-flame itself glinted in her curlin’ hair, that was but half held in by a twistin’ cord o’ gold,—an’ pure grey an’ clear as dewdhrops on grass before sunrise were the laughin’ eyes o’ her.

Sure, Mogh the swineherd, that was cross an’ old, rose up from the rock on the shore, where he’d been sittin’ by a sstranger,—an’ his quare

pinched face shone glad at seein' her. An' says the one beside him, that was covered head an' all with a rough cloak:

"Whose are the light soft feet I hear comin'?"

"Those of Alona, child o' Fathach," says Mogh. "But Light o' me Eyes is the name he calls her, an' that same is she to all knowin' the sweet ways o' her,—barrin' that few save myself an' the man Bobaran ever see sight o' her in the sea-glen o' Fathach the Dhreamer."

Then Light o' me Eyes, seein' that one not known to her was with Mogh, came toward them; an' says she:

"Is it a sstranger come journeyin' this way, Mogh, an' ye not afther bringin' him to me father for food an' shelter? 'Tis no kind restin' place for one weary, on rocks by the shore, with night comin' across the hills."

At that the man raised his head an' flung back his cloak; an' 'twas the right noble young face he had, forbye the eyes o' him were closed. An' in his hand was a little small harp o' carven shell.

Sure, all the happiness o' Light o' me Eyes

was drowned in heart-ache, lookin' at him.
"Can ye not see, harper?" says she.

"Nay," answered the harper. "No sight is given me eyes, o' the fair sun on the green sides o' tossin' waves, or o' the dawn growin' bright on the dark hills."

"But how came ye here?" she asked, wonderin', "seein' as how the roads are but lost paths in the forest, an' all is wild land for many a mile, save only the swellin' place o' Fathach, where he sits dhreamin' o' the white stars. Have ye not come by a wrong way?"

"Nay," says the harper again, "for no path chosen, but that o' chance do I follow. Far have I wandhered, through storm an' wind, through days warm an' soft with sunshine; yet never has there been lack o' one willin' to lead me onward."

"Then shall hand o' mine guide ye to a kindly roof this night," says Light o' me Eyes, pitiful like. "'Tis Fathach me father is well pleased at hearin' harpin' or singin' in the hall, an' has ever welcome for one comin' weary." An' givin' the berries to Mogh, an' biddin' him follow, she led the harper from the shore an' up

the glen, watchin' careful that no stone or fallen branch should be afther trippin' him.

In a while they came on a low grey house o' logs, in the turn o' the glen, where a light smoke was curlin' up, tellin' o' meat roastin' within'. An' peerin' from the door stood a squat little dwarf of a man, that cried out:

“Food is waitin' for ye, Light o' me Eyes. Long has Fathach been pacin' up an' down, restless like, for that ye came not.”

Then says Alona: “ ‘Tis a guest I have here, Bobaran. See that there's meat an' dhrink a plenty, an' give a horn o' mead, an' what else ye have, to Mogh, that was afther bringin' him to the sea-glen.”

Quick the dwarf servin' man ran to obey, hoppin' an' jumpin' along: but Light o' me Eyes drew the blind harper within to Fathach, an' gave him a seat by the rough hewn table, tellin' her father how she'd come on him.

“ ‘Tis welcome ye are, for a day or a year o' days,” says Fathach, that was tall an' bent, with long white hair an' gentle eyes that were misted over with much thinkin'. “Eat an'

rest." An' he set the best of all there before the wandherin' harper.

Now when all had eaten, they went out to where benches were set undher a great oak tree, an' sat silent in the dyin' light while the harper played old songs merry an' sad, an' at last a *fonnsheen* so wild an' sstrange that Alona cried out, frightened like,—raisin' her fair head from where it had been leanin' on Fathach's shouldher.

" 'Tis deep in dhreamin' I was!" says she. "A long road was I thravellin', an' at last, by a deep river, I saw two stars fallin' from the night sky into a golden crown that I was holdin'."

"Mayhap 'tis a dhream not all a dhream," says the harper. "Hear me now, Fathach, an' you, gentle daughter o' Fathach. Thanks have ye not yet had o' me for the welcome given, or for the kind word that is far more nor gold. But even as I give them, an' tell ye me errand, do I bring ye a sstrange knot, hard for untyin'. Hear, O Fathach, a sure token o' me faith." An' he whispered a secret word in the ear o'

the Dhreamer, that nodded, understandin'. But Light o' me Eyes waited, silent.

Then spoke the harper, low an' sad. An' says he: "Dallan—the blind one—was the name given me in the dûn o' King Ciad, where at many a high feast I sang brave songs to cheer the hearts o' men. An' now that gloom sits there in place o' mirth, for many a day have I, an' all the harpers o' King Ciad's court, gone searchin' wide an' far, hopin' to find one that may bring back seein' to the King, an' save the land from sore sorrow an' an evil ruler. For Balor, kinsman to Ciad, that was afther hatin' him for bein' alive at all—when himself had long been set on bein' King in room o' one far betther skilled in the fightin'—thricked him into breakin' in on secrets o' the Little People,—Ciad not knowin' where himself was goin'. An' they, angered at any overlookin' them, took sight from his eyes an' left him helpless that was so strhong. Now is there cloud o' black war, risin' over the land, an' Balor sayin' that Ciad should be no more King, not bein' able to lead his warriors in battle. Yet have the people love for Ciad, an' naught betther nor fear an'

hate for Balor, that was ever layin' heavy burdens on those weak. Sure, a year—now nigh spent—did they set for waitin', thinkin' ever that sight might come back to the right King."

"Can that be?" asked Light o' me Eyes, eager.

"One that had favor among them gained a word from the Little People. An' they told him: 'The lovin' touch, on darkened eyes, of a maid willin' to take that shadow on herself, will free one blind by no fault o' his own.' "

"An' has none been found willin'?" asked Fathach.

"None," says the harper, touchin' a sad note. "For what girleen, lovin' the stars an' the fair sun-dawn, an' the gleam o' blossoms in the fresh grass, would make choice to go in darkness,—even as Ciad's queen, led ever by tender hands,—for sake o' bringin' sight an' safety to a sstrange King an' a people dwellin' far from her, when never one at Ciad's court nor in all the land about but shrank in dread from that same?"

"Then will I not shrink!" says Light o' me

Eyes, soft as the fallin' of a rose. "The far questin' is done, harper."

Sure, 'twas not Fathach nor yet the blind harper, but Mogh the swineherd that sudden flung himself down at her little feet,—where she'd risen in the young moonlight,—cryin' out against the word she'd spoken.

"Far betther had I let the sstranger wandher over the cliff-side an' be dashed on the rocks o' the shore!" says he. "What is he, to bring bitther grief to the sea-glen o' Fathach, an' a darkened life to Light o' me Eyes?"

An' says the harper: "'Tis right he is! Naught am I to ask it!"

Then says Alona: "'Tis not ye that ask it, not yet King Ciad, but the tremblin' hearts o' those helpless in war, an' those old, with white hair, in the land whence ye came, Dallan!"

"It shall not be!" cried the harper, with a wild beat on the harp strings that echoed far.

"It shall be!" says Fathach, grave an' stern, "for the white stars have heard the given word o' Light o' me Eyes. This night will I spend watchin' them, to gain clear counsel, an' it may be, learn the will o' them far sstronger nor Bal-

or an' the Little People. An' in the mornin' shall Mogh guide an' guard ye, through the deep forest an' to find King Ciad."

With that he led the way within: an' when all were sleepin' sound, he went out under the open sky.

Early in the grey o' mornin' all was made ready for departin'. The look o' deep wisdom was in the eyes o' Fathach, but his words were few, as he bade farewell to Light o' me Eyes an' gave her courage. But Mogh he held back till the others had passed among the trees; an' says he: "Sthrong power to ward off ill is in the pure heart o' Light o' me Eyes. Yet guard well this ring o' wrought bronze I give ye, an' in the hour when peril past other wardin' comes nigh her, be ready an' fling it from ye upward, sayin': 'Fall, Evil, on the Evil-Hearted!' "

Then Mogh, takin' the ring, hastened afther Alona, that was guidin' the blind harper down a fern-grown path, where the night mists were still clingin',—on into the deep o' the forest; an' for a time they went forward silent, as three in a dhream.

Yet afther a while,—the way leadin' down to

the shore, an' the little small waves dancin' an' leapin' in the sun, where fresh wind had scattered the mist,—Light o' me Eyes began singin', an' the dull weight on the hearts o' them with her grew less, an' their steps lighter. An' says she:

“ ‘Tis a blithe day for journeyin’! We should go far. An’ ‘tis o’ King Ciad I’m wonderin’ on the way,—whether he loves harpin’ an’ singin’ well, an’ whether ‘tis a strong arm he has for the whirlin’ sword-play. An’ is he one gentle to those weaker nor he?”

“Ay,” says the harper. “That same he strove to be, though ‘tis but young he was when the black shadow fell, an’ had had but little time for aught else but leadin’ his men as a warrior. Yet a name for skill in harpin’ he had won, an’ ‘tis meself has heard him singin’ at a high feast.”

“An’ was there no maid known to him with heart to go in darkness for his sake, that he must send searchin’ through far lands for one to aid him an’ his people?” says Mogh, grim-like, trampin’ on behind with bent head.

“Nay!” cried the harper. “One there was,

that thought much o' bein' Queen an' wearin' cloth o' silk an' a golden torque set with rare jewels; an' fair was her proud face to Ciad. But as well might he have been afther lovin' wather that had run past into the sea, as her when sorrow came to him!"

An' so they fared on' over sand an' shingle, ever away from the sea-glen o' Fathach. When the sun was high they rested for a while, an' ate what Mogh had brought, on a fallen log by the shore; but they slept, that night, in the dark forest, where Mogh made a bit o' fire with dhry sticks, an' built a shelter for Light o' me Eyes out o' brakes an' brambles. An' 'twas Mogh that brought wather, but the harper would let none other but himself be lavin' the little feet o' Light o' me Eyes, as she leaned weary against a tree; an' for many an' hour 'twas he played soft an' low, that fair dhreams should come to her. An' Mogh an' the harper slept only by turn, lest any danger stir nigh her.

With light they went on again,—Mogh knowin' well the straight way south, where a swift, wild sthream ran,—the River o' Gray Rapids, they called it, beyant which the rule o'

King Ciad still held power. An' on the second night they made a restin' place for Alona on a hill-slope, where was a patch o' fern among the heather. An' the harper wrapped his cloak about her, to shield her from the chill in the air; an' all night he sat wakeful. But all this time they met no man.

Now toward the twilight o' the third day, the air brought them the dull rush o' flowin' wather near. An' with it came sstrange noises to them; horns o' huntin' where no hunters were, an' wailin' like the *shee* dancin' in the wind. An' white as moonlight, an' stern grew the face o' the blind harper; but Alona—carin' for naught but findin' the safest path among the rocks an' bushes for his feet, an' o' cheerin' him an' Mogh as they went—had a laugh blithe as Spring to answer all evil sounds.

“ ‘Tis the River o' Gray Rapids at last,” says Mogh, when they'd reached the strand. “ An' in the mornin' I'll search out a way for crossin’.”

“ An' may we soon come on King Ciad,” says Alona, “ for well I know the heart o' Fathach

will be wearyin' for the hour when Mogh comes bringin' me homeward."

"Homeward!" says the harper. "Nay, 'tis Queen o' the land Ciad will have ye afther bein', 'Alona! Sure, love an' high honour will be for ye, an' riches at yer feet! Have ye forgot?"

" 'Tis not for that I came," says Light o' me Eyes, "but for helpin' as a free gift, where was sore need. An'—an' it may be some time ye'll come again to the Sea-glen, Dallan, an' sing o' sunshine an' fair blossoms, an' o' the wandherin' in the forest these days. Sure, that would be far betther nor gold an' silken robes."

But the blind harper was silent; an' when 'Alona slept, he sat by Mogh, hearkenin' to the river.

At last says he: "No longer can I bear the touch o' her soft hand guidin' me, nor the tender, merry voice, like a lilt o' song beside me. Let me wandher away alone to what may come, an' do ye take her, Mogh, back by another path to the sea-glen, tellin' her I'm gone an' ye've lost the way. Ay, rather will I let the river dash me body among the sharp rocks o' the rapids an' beat out life, before havin' her take

such doom on her through me. Never a King nor a kingdom is worth it!"'

" 'Tis too late," says Mogh. " 'Willin' would I be, but not for any word o' man dare I cross the biddin' o' Fathach, that has knowledge o' things far off, an' power in sstrange ways. An' more nor aught I could say would it now take to stay Light o' me Eyes from crossin' the sstream before us in search o' King Ciad."

" Yet if she find him not?" says the harper. But Mogh laid hand on his arm.

" Hearken!" says he. " 'Tis the clash of armour an' voices that's comin' over the wather from the far shore; an' flickerin' o' firelight among the bushes beyant."

" It may be that all fordin' places are held by Balor," says the harper, " lest any cross bringin' aid to Ciad. Or it may be sstrange warriors come to make havoc in the land. Far wiser, Mogh, that ye follow me counsel an' turn away from a King already nigh lost."

" First will I know," says Mogh. " Stay ye here, guardin' Light o' me Eyes till I come again." An' with that he plunged straight into the wather an' swam steady, battlin' the cur-

rent, across the river to where were the fires he'd seen; an' then crept up, aisy like, through long grass, till he heard low speakin' almost beside him. An' a long while he crouched there, hearin' all said by two warriors that sat apart from the rest, nigh to a hut o' reeds. An' not till they'd made an end an' gone away to the fires did he stir down to the wather again, an' back through the river, that swirled him about like the wind a leaf, ere he could reach the shore where Dallan was waitin', ever hearkenin' for what might come.

“ ‘Tis Balor himself is yondher, with many a stout warrior, an' was holdin' counsel away from them with one called Eoghan, never dhreamin' that any was hearin' from the long grass,” says Mogh, wringin' the wather from what he wore.

“Then must we be afther findin' other place for crossin’,” says the harper, “for evil are the eyes o' Balor on any fair young girleen.”

“An’ ‘twas speakin’ o’ one long wandhered away they were,” says Mogh, “that was under sthrong *geis* to tell none his name while beyant the River o’ Gray Rapids.”

"Ay!" says the harper, still as wather afther rain. "An' what o' him?"

"That his was a hopeless quest, seein' how two days more—an' the year up then—would bring Balor the Kingship. Yet has he had, in secret, the river bank held by certain men from the wild outlands, that know no masther save Balor, an' would bring to him any that crossed, without lettin' the warriors know. For that has Balor made lyin' rumors a raison for bringin' the army hither."

"Then have the warriors still hope for Ciad?" asked the harper, eager.

" 'Tis Balor himself says the very army at his back an' round him would rise an' cast him out in a breath, if Ciad stood among them seein'," answered Mogh; an' then would he say no more, but lay down an' fell asleep, wet as he was, an' never stirred for many an hour, till—loud in his ear—came a wild cry, an' he sprang up to see the harper strivin' to beat back armed men. Even as he woke, two gripped himself, an' at the shore was Light o' me Eyes held in a boat o' skins by yet another. Strugglin' was useless. 'Twas but a minute afore all three were bein'

ferried over the surgin' wather an' haled up the bank, scarce fair awake as they were, to the hut o' reeds, where, at the door, stood a sullen-faced warrior. An' Mogh knew it Balor himself, by the voice he'd heard in the night,—an' quick he cast the rough cloak over Dallan.

For a moment they stood, an' then—“Have the men bound an' flung far away in the bushes!” says Balor to the man Eoghan, that was by him.

“That shall ye not!” says Light o' me Eyes; an' swift she'd the bow free in her hands, an' the arrow from it quiverin' in the shoulder o' him that would ha' laid hold on the harper. An' Mogh, dhrawin' his knife, warned off all. Then Balor, with a harsh laugh, sprang forward an' wrenched the bow from the soft hands, an' would ha' seized Alona herself,—but at her cry the sstrong arm o' the harper went round her, an' Balor was flung back in the doorway, an' for a moment could get no breath. An' Mogh saw many a stout warrior hurryin' toward them from the campin' place beyant.

“He is blind! Are ye men, to harm a blind

singer?" says Alona, never fearin' aught for herself.

"An' whither fare ye, lady, with a wild kerne an' a blind harper?" says the man Eoghan, sneerin'.

"To the King!" says she, "to save him an' the land from evil!"

"The King?" says Balor, his face afire at her beauty an' courage,—" 'Tis I, Balor, shall be King, the morrow, an' ye Queen! Ciad lies dead in the forest!"

"Dead!" cried the harper.

"Ay!" says Balor, "an' 'tis ye shall follow him this hour, for the blow ye gave!"

But before the dagger was from his sheath, Alona turned sudden to the harper, with brave light o' lovin' in her face; an'—"Take sight, then, pulse o' me heart!" says she, layin' her lips on his eyes. "Betther ye nor me in this hour!"

But no shadow fell on her sweet eyes! In that very breath, Mogh, that had been watchin' keen, hurled from him the bronze ring o' Fathach, cryin'—"Fall, Evil, on the Evil-Hearted!"

An' as out o' the sky, curse an' ring struck
the dark face o' Balor, that staggered, with
sudden hands to his brow,—an' dropped heavy
to the ground.

The harper strode an' leaned over Balor, in
sight o' the warriors nigh them; an' says he:

“Was yon truth or a lie ye spake o' Ciad?”

“ ‘Tis dead he is!” says Balor,—strikin' at
air with his dagger, fierce an' wild.

“Nay!” cried the harper,—sudden flingin'
the rough cloak from him, an' lettin' his shout
ring out glad as he turned. “Nay, Light o' me
Eyes! For I am Ciad, an' I see!”

But slow an' alone, as night fell,—Mogh the
swineherd, that was cross an' old, fared on his
way back to the sea-glen o' Fathach.

XIV

CONN THE BOASTER

[“A story? ‘Tis always a story ye’re wantin’. Where’s me weedin’ o’ the garden to come in at all, at all? Sure, ‘tis no peace ye’re afther givin’ me! ‘Tis worse nor the Little People treated Conn the fat cook. Be whist, now, if yees want to hear about it.”]

’Twas King Dermot was a mighty ruler,—but growin’ old as time went by, he sent far an’ wide for a champion to aid him fightin’ the Danes. Many a man came to try his chances,—only to be tumbled over by some o’ those in the court. An’ King Dermot wanted one sthronger nor any o’ *them*; so when at last Prince Aongas, that had been livin’ poor in exile, beat down the last man that stood against him, King Dermot gave him his daughter, Princess Enya, an’ made

him the greatest man in the kingdom, all but exceptin' himself.

As I said before, King Dermot was gettin' on to be old, so afther Prince Aongas was wed to Enya o' the Fair Hands, 'twas for him to rule in place o' Dermot. An' sure, the king found it mighty aisy an' pleasant to lie abed o' mornin's an' take his comfort, instead o' risin' up to hear all the troubles that the people brought to be settled. An' for that same, he moved his sleepin' place to a high tower on the back wall o' the castle, that looked down into a little small courtyard, where 'twas few people came.

Now, early one mornin' he was roused before his hour by a great clatter o' tongues below. An' bein' cross as the crabs at losin' his mornin' nap, he rose up an' poked his grey head out o' the window. 'Twas two men was makin' all the to-do, an' arguyin' like mad. One was a big stout man, with a white cloth tied about him, that puffed an' breathed hard while he spoke; an' that was Conn, the chief cook. While the other, that did only half as much o' the talkin', was Art, the groom. A dark, wiry lad was that same, an' betther nor many at the leapin'.

An' says Conn: "What for a man is Aongas, then? Sure, that big fellow, Conal o' the Shield, could ha' made three o' him, an' 'twas no work at all that I beat *him* till he ran out o' the back door o' the castle. An' had I been dressed in fine cloth, an' not in this that I've on, 'tis I should ha' had the Princess."

'Twas Art was goin' to answer him to the same tune, an' tell how himself had thrapped up Breogan at the wrestlin', though that was a man that had thrashed Conn in his time,—but just then King Dermot gave a bit of a sneeze, an' Art, bein' a quick-witted lad, changed his manner, an' drew on Conn to talk louder an' louder, havin' a spite against him for more raisons nor one.

"Ay," said Conn, "an' if the Danes came, 'tis meself would dhrive them scamperin' sooner nor a boy like Aongas, that never was half fed till he came to this place."

At that, King Dermot, thinkin' he'd heard a plenty, pulled in his head an' went down to the great hall. There sat Aongas on the high seat, an' many people o' the court standin' by him. When he saw King Dermot, he rose up to give

him place, but Dermot sat down beside him an' waited till all was quiet. Then he beckoned to Colla, the waitin' boy, that knelt at his feet.

"Go, bring Conn, the cook, from where he stands talkin' loud in the little small courtyard, an' be swift."

Sure, every last one was wondherin' what King Dermot was wantin' with Conn, an' waited to find out. So back runs Colla, an' Conn followin' with his big shoulthers swingin' from side to side as he walked, an' his head settin' back on his chin. When he saw the look in the eyes o' King Dermot he fell down on his knees for fear o' what might be comin'. An' says the king:

"'Tis good ye are at the roastin' o' meat, Conn. An' 'tis fond o' good eatin' ye are. Now, 'tis in my mind to give ye a lesson that ye're sore needin'." With that he told what he'd been hearin'.

An' first one spoke, an' then another,—tellin' what should befall him to teach him betther use o' his tongue. But far from King Dermot's mind was thought o' spoilin' the best cook he

had by dhroppin' him in the river, or settin' the dogs to chase him o'er the hills.

At last says Aongas, laughin', "Dhrive a great stake on the bank o' the river, close by the ford, an' chain him tight to it. An' there let him stay till one passes that is a greater boaster nor he. An' let his food be crusts from the table an' wather from the river."

Conn said naught,—thinkin' that he'd come off aisy afther all he'd said, an' scornin' such light punishment. "Sure," thought he, " 'Twill be no time at all afore I'm back in me own kitchen. 'Tis a fine time I'll be havin', down there by the river, watchin' the world go by, an' havin' no work to be worryin' me."

But he was reckonin' without Art, the groom. As soon as they'd left Conn by the ford, Art went off, when none was lookin', an' across countrry to his mother; an' 'twas on the road to the castle she lived. An' from her he took promise that no man should pass without bein' warned o' the plight o' Conn, an' not to boast o' nothin' whatever.

So when the first thraveller, that was an old man with earthen pots to sell, came hobblin'

along the road to the ford, there sat Conn, makin' out that he was enjoyin' the fine weather, an' payin' no manner of attention to the great stake.

"Good day," says he, 'An' "good day to ye,"' says the potter.

"Ye look like a man that has done things worth spakin' of," says Conn. "Sit down an' chat a bit."

"Not I," says the other. "'Tis but a poor potter that I am, an' have done no deeds at all barrin' the makin' o' pots an' pipkins,—an' that mortal poorly." With that, bein' warned, an' mindin' how once Conn had dhriven him from the kitchen door without bite nor sup, he tucked up his ragged gown an' waded across the ford,—Conn watchin' him uncomfortably.

Next to come was Manus the Singer, an' Conn had great hopes of him, for that he was terrible proud o' his verses. So he smiled round undher his ears, an' made his voice fat an' soft.

"'Tis a long weary time ye've been away from us, Manus," says he. "An' 'tis missin' yer elegant singin' we've been. Sure now, in all

yer thravels ye've never met yer like at the
verse makin'.”

“Nay,” says Manus, winkin’ a bit to himself, but pretendin’ ‘twas the sun makin’ him blink, —“over an’ by where the river at our feet pours its wathers into the ragin’ Sea o’ Moyle, I found a man singin’ in the hall o’ King Ivar the Dane, by whom ‘tis I am but a bungler.”

“ ‘Tis yer modesty,” says Conn. “Sure, the very words ye use to tell of it are ones that wouldn’t come in the mind o’ common men.”

Now that tickled Manus, for all he’d been warned by Art’s old mother. Perhaps he might ha’ sat down then, an’ told what a fine singer he was, but just then his eye fell on the chain that held Conn.

“What for is that round ye?” says he.

“To kape me from fallin’ in the river,” says Conn. “ ‘Tis fair worn out I am with the great heat o’ the fire; so King Dermot sent me here to recover meself, an’ the chain for fear I’d be feelin’ weak.”

“ ‘Tis meself is feelin’ weak, an’ hungry by that,” says Manus. “I’ll be goin’ up to the

castle an' seein' what is roastin' for dinner." An' off he strode through the ford.

An' so it went till night came, an' Colla brought Conn a few hard crusts for his eatin'. An' 'twas glad enough poor Conn was to get any food to set his teeth in, for he was nigh famished, never havin' gone empty so long.

'Twas ill he slept that night, but for hopin' that some great boaster might come passin', an' not be able to kape from tellin' o' his fine doin's. But all in vain. Four an' five days went, an' no one would be any help in the way he wanted.

Now Conn slept so light,—the chain makin' him onaisy,—that a breath of a word could rouse him. When the seventh night darkened he was dozin' where he lay, an' by an' by some-
thin' pricked the sole o' his foot. He rooched round, onaisy like, an' turned over. Then down by his side he heard small voices talkin'. An' says one:

"Behold me amazin' strength. Though I am not the height o' this big man's knee, when I put me shouldher to his foot, I heaved him over entirely!"

"Pooh," says the other voice. " 'Tis naught

to me own doin'. Yester morn I stood behind a bush across the river from the castle gate an' dhrew a long breath; an' so powerful was it that the gate swung outward, an' half a dozen o' the King's men were dragged through it. 'Twas no use their tryin' to resist at all!"

"Aha!" thought Conn. "Here's me chance, forbye I can catch what I'm not seein'. 'Tis either one o' yees will serve me turn like butther on a cake!"

So he made a mighty sweep o' his arm, an' his hand came against the long hair o' somethin', an' he held on with all his power.

Ay, but there was a squealin' an' a squirlin' an' a big outcry all to once. When the little man found himself caught he stamped hard with his foot, an' Conn felt the ground sinkin' undher him; an' before he knew it he was fallen flat on his face in a wide lighted hall, with hundreds o' the Little People crowdin' round to see him,—but him still grippin' the hair an' the little red cap o' their fellow, that cried out terrible.

Then one that was bigger nor most came up to Conn. "By what right do ye tumble into our hall, man o' much flesh?"

“By no rights but that I was brought, savin’ yer presence,” says Conn.

“Loose the hair o’ me son, an’ give him his cap,” ordhered the chief.

“Ay, when he promises to stand by me at break o’ morn, an’ to say to King Dermot what he said in me hearin’ o’ his great strength.”

“That I’ll not!” cried the son. “ ’Twas but a bit o’ boastin’, an’ no great matther at that.”

“I thought that same,” says Conn, “an’ for that I’ve held on. ’Tis meself has been in a bad way through over much boastin’. An’ King Dermot ’ll kape me chained to this stake till one comes by that’s a greater boaster nor meself. Promise by all ye hold holy that ye’ll help me back to freedom, an’ I’ll let go, an’ give back the cap.”

“Promise, me son,” says the chief; an’ afther that Conn loosed his hold.

“But how’ll I get back to the top o’ the ground?” says Conn.

“ ’Tis aisy,” says the chief o’ the Little People. “First ye must cook our supper, an’ we’ll befriend ye afther.”

Conn, thinkin’ that an aisy matther, followed

the Little People to their kitchen. An' 'tis the truth I'm tellin' ye when I say that 'twas the hardest task he'd ever undertaken. Ye see, 'twas too low for him to stand upright, an' while the fire was half a decent size, the dishes for cookin' were so small that he came nigh on crushin' them between his two big hands. An' the knives an' spoons were scarce to be seen.

The whole night through they kept him toilin' there for them, an' at last when he'd cooked all they had, he dropped down clean exhausted an' heard himself begin to snore. By an' by the noise grew louder. He opened his eyes sudden like, an' there he was, lyin' in a mighty cramped way,—still tied to the stake at the ford; an' down the hill was comin' Colla with his pan o' crusts.

Well, now, Conn was wondherin' if the Little People was forgettin' their promise, or if he'd dhreamed it all: but just as Colla came near, a small crooked man hobbled up the road an' spoke to him. An' before he'd said many words, 'twas Colla was flyin' up to the gate an' callin' all the men to come an' let Conn loose,

for beyant there was one that more nor matched him a hundred times an' more to boot.

So down came the court,—Aongas an' the King at their head,—to listen to the tales o' the crooked man, not knowin' that he was the chief's son o' the Little People. An' not only did he tell his own boastin' over, but that o' his companion for his own doin', so that such tales were never heard.

An' the end o' that all was the loosin' o' fat Conn, that was less fat nor before, by that same token; an' back he went to his kitchen, needin' no more warnin' to kape his tongue at home. An' 'tis I am thinkin' the little man was none too eager to be afther boastin' in the dark again, without first makin' sure that no fat cook was listenin'.

XV

THE KING O' THE THREE WINDS

[“So yees liked hearin’ o’ Lēn? Sure ‘twas a mighty smith he was, up under the rainbow, an’ masther o’ craft beyant all mortal men; an’ not mindin’ a bit o’ jestin’, either, when time served. I mind hearin’ once—whist, now, an’ I’ll tell yees that one tale more, about him, an’ that’ll be the last.”]

THERE was one day when mighty battlin’ was goin’ on, far to the west. An’ Lēn, wearyin’ o’ the sun-forge, an’ the bright curvin’ o’ the rainbow, leaned on the north wind to look down at the heroes strivin’ for masthery on the sea-coast, with the waves beatin’ in high on the rocks. An’ more nor one carried spear or shield o’ Lēn’s forgin’, an’ the sun shinin’ on the swing o’ swords was like sparks flyin’ from his

furnace. An' what had come to pass aforetime happened again; for sure, a second time his hammer slipped from his grasin' an' fell through the clouds.

But 'tis truth I'm tellin' yees that 'twas many an hour before he knew that same. Little meanin' had time an' the passin' o' time to Lēn. The wild fight was still ragin' on, an' naught cared he for work other than seein' it. So not till truce was cried was he afther lookin' round for his own; an' then no matther where he looked he could see no trace o' that same far off nor close by him. An' dark an' cloud had blown across the sea, coverin' day with night. So back went Lēn to his forge, an' sat down for thinkin'—seein' as how he couldn't be workin'—an' the north wind rumbled in his chimney.

Many a day passed in that thinkin', an' all that time the north wind blew cowld across the land from the Ould Sea, so that men were feared o' winter comin' before harvestin'. At last Lēn roused to be doin', an' with a mighty laugh that shook the tops o' the cloud mountains, he strode off down the bridge o' fog shadows to seek for his hammer; with the north wind at his heel,

quiet, an' scarce darin' to scatter the wet mists out o' the path.

Now 'twas comin' to be the end o' harvestin' on the lands o' Mahon, chieftain o' the men o' Rosnaree. An' in the hall o' the wide earthen dún sat Mahon an' the older men, tellin' tales o' heroes, with tall flagons o' foamin' mead before them; but on the grass by the little river the young men an' boys were playin' at ball, an' castin' spears at a mark; an' headin' them all was Rodan, sister's son to Mahon, dressed fine in rich cloth o' green laced with gold. An' never a one o' them could match him at the games.

Now while they were runnin' back an' along the river bank, one lad that happened to be afther lookin' over his shouldher began laughin' an' laughin'. An' says Rodan, laughin' too—

“What for are ye makin' me spoil me aim?”

“ ‘Tis for the ould beggar man,” says the lad. “See him comin', now, an' draggin' an empty chain as if 'twas his dog he was leadin'. An' sure, 'tis speakin' to it he is, tellin' it to be quiet.”

With that, all save Rodan started laughin' at

the ould, crooked beggar man that was comin' down by the wather side, all in a ragged cloak, carryin' a bit of a rusty chain, an' in his belt more pieces o' that same.

As he came nigher, a cowld north wind flutherin' the tatthered cloak he wore, an' flingin' it back that any might see the bare knotted arms an' strong hands of him, he turned aside an' threw the chain round a bit of a saplin' that grew near, an' at once the wind fell. Then he looked round at the lads.

"Is it for sake o' me rags that ye're jeerin' at an ould man?" says he.

"Nay," says Rodan, lookin' wrath at his fellows. "'Tis at yer empty chain they were laughin', as boys will. None o' the house o' Mahon will ye find showin' scorn to age or to one in need. An' a night's lodgin' an' a piece o' silver Mahon gives to any that come, an' none may question whither he goes afther."

"A rare jewel have I lost," says the ould bent beggar, lookin' sharp at Rodan under his shaggy brows, "an' near an' far have I been seekin' it."

"Then come with me to Mahon an' the wiser

men, an' it may be they'll have heard somewhat of it, an' be afther guidin' ye to find that same,'" says Rodan, gentle like; an' takin' the arm o' the sstranger, to be helpin' him a bit, he led him in at the door.

Now Mahon, lookin' up, saw the two comin'; an' risin' to meet one older an' seemin' feebler nor himself, he caught a glint o' the deep eyes under the heavy brows, an' knew well from years past who was in his hall as guest. But never a word he spoke showin' it, for betther he thought it to wait on the will o' one mightier nor him.

" 'Tis kindly welcome ye are,'" says he, ddrawin' forward the bench for him to be seated. An' Rodan brought food an' spread it on the board before the wayfarin' man, an' his own golden cup filled brimmin' with wine.

" 'Tis a sstranger, weary with farin' far to seek a lost jewel,'" spoke Rodan, "an' needin' rest an' aidin'."

"An' what for a threasure was that same?'" asked one o' Mahon's men, that sat nigh. "Maybe one among us may have heard talk of it, an' can give ye word where to find it."

For a time the ould man made no answer; but afther eatin' a while (an' 'twas the amazin' hunger he seemed to be havin'), he leaned his arm on the rough oaken table an' looked at Mahon, that had been silent, thinkin' o' many wonderful things.

"What for a wind had ye yestermorn?" says he.

Then Mahon, showin' respect as to a famed warrior, answered—

"For three hours afther sunrise it blew from the east. Then for three more from the west. Then came a strhong gale from the south. An' like that same has it been for ten days an' ten more."

"An' has no wind come from the north?" asked the ould man.

"Not in all that time," says Mahon. "Before those days was naught but stormin' from the north for long weeks."

Then Rodan spoke eagerly. "Ay, but in this very hour came wind from the north, blowin' our spears past their mark." An' as the words came from him, a deep growlin' was heard without the dûn, an' a sweep o' wind that stirred the

thatch above their heads. Rodan looked up wondherin', but the ould man chuckled.

" 'Tis me dog, restless from bein' tied in one place," says he; an' then low, that none but Mahon heard; "me dog, the north wind. 'Tis for his fellows I seek, servants o' the hammer that slipped from me grasp while I leaned watchin' the war o' the western heroes. An' he would have gone too had I not been houldin' him."

"Ay?" says Mahon. "Then hear what word o' them I have for ye, good masther o' wisdom an' lord o' power, rememberin' well yer aid given free in me hour o' need in a year long past. Yester morn rode up the river bank a man in rich armour, an' afther him many a sthrong fightin' man. An' last o' them, on a lame pony, a sour-faced dwarf. An' when Rodan here questioned o' them who they were, none would give civil word save the dwarf, that cried out: ' 'Tis me lord the King o' the Three Winds, returnin' from victory. An' 'tis an ill fate comes to any that hindher him.' An' no more word would he speak, but rode away past on his

limpin' nag. Sure, never was such a king known of any in these parts."

The ould beggar nodded, as bein' well pleased, an' rose. An' so tall was he that he'd need to be stoopin' to pass the lintel o' the door.

"What lad is this same that led me to ye, Mahon o' Rosnaree?" says he, his voice as deep as a wave in the heart o' the Ould Sea.

"Rodan, sister's son to me," says Mahon, "an' the very core o' me heart, seein' that no sons o' me own house have I, to give aidin' in battle when me right arm fails me with age."

"An' has he won honour to his name?" says the ould man.

"Not yet," answered Mahon, lookin' lovin' at the lad, an' seein' the hot blood risin' in his cheeks from hearin' the two discussin' him. "Time an' plenty for that," says Mahon.

"Then give him leave to go with me on me questin'," says the ould man. "Rare fame shall he win, an' a warrior shall he be, fit to match with heroes."

An' while Rodan sprang first to his feet in wrath at any thinkin' him one to go trudgin' in

the dust by a ragged beggar man, yet he'd no more nor met the eyes o' the sstranger than all anger left him, an' 'twas to the end o' the world he'd have gone willin' with that same.

"Ay," says Mahon. "'Tis meself is well content to have him serve ye. This many a day has he been wearyin' to go out seekin' fortune."

With never another word the sstranger bent an' passed the door, an' Rodan afther him, never heedin' the wondher o' the lads round about. An' mazed were all when they saw the ould man givin' him the chains from his belt to carry, himself unwindin' the one from the saplin'.

"Which road went the King o' the Three Winds?" says the beggar.

"Toward the Ford of Echoes, I heard one cry out," says Rodan.

So on by day an' night, never restin' for aught but the askin' some passer-by as to the man they were huntin', they went through the wood an' over hill an' rock, till they reached the Ford of Echoes. An' there, on the hillside before them, rose a great high castle, with grey towers an' wide walls. An' waverin' it seemed, once

an' again, like a thing in a dhream. Sure, the ould man sat down laughin'.

“ ‘Tis his gran’ dwellin’ we’ve been afther discoverin’, Rodan,” says he, “ Will ye batther it down with yer hands, or shall I set me dog to the work?”

“ An’ afther ‘tis done will yer treasure lie open to ye?” says the lad.

“ That’s for thinkin’ about,” says the other, well pleased. “ ‘Tis a wise word ye spoke, not knowin’. Scant use to break down his walls before findin’ where he’s me jewel hid. Whist, now, for one’s comin’ down the hillside.”

While they stood watchin’, a dead branch cracked, an’ to the ford, to dhraw wather, came a straight, slender girleen, an’ on her shouldher was an earthen jar. When she saw the two beyant the runnin’ sthream she shook her head.

“ ‘Tis an ill land this for any poor men farin’ alone. Betther that ye hasten on, stayin’ for naught, till ye pass the power o’ Curigh Mor.”

“ An’ who may be Curigh Mor, that men journeyin’ in peace should fear him?” asked Rodan, seein’ how fair was the curlin’ black hair o’ the maid, an’ the little white feet in the grass.

"King o' the Three Winds is he, an' has been for a score o' days an' more," says she. "A poor kerne was he born, an' thrall in me father's house. One day 'twas himself came in with somethin' shinin' under his cloak; an' when me father asked what was that same, he spoke scorn o' his masthery, an' sthruck him down. An' from that hour power over three winds has he gained—east an' west an' south, to work his will. An' for that I would say naught to him, the walls o' me father's dwellin' lie scatthered an' blown far down the mountain side; an' meself must ddraw the wather an' be servin' maid to them that serve him; an' all for scornin' him. Three times have I fled far down the river bank, an' each time has one o' the winds caught me an' blown me back to his castle gate. An' 'tis small hope o' help from any livin' man I have, for none can withstand the winds out o' the sky."

"An' whose child may ye be, that has been so mistreated?" says the ould man. "Maybe we'll be afther findin' some way to aid ye."

"Eimer is me name, daughter o' him that was Duach o' the Ford," says she, bendin' to fill her

jar with clear wather. "An' a good warrior was that same, that sthruck no man from behind, even when it was his own slave rebellin'."

"Then shall yer wrong be righted," says the ould man. "Choose for yerself whether by me dog or me man, here."

Eimer looked at him, doubtin', an' her eyes grew dark with anger. "'Tis mockin' me ye are," says she. "I see no dog followin' ye; an' what can a lad like yon do against the King o' the Three Winds? If he have the power in his arm to slay even the meanest kerne that slinks by the gates o' Curigh Mor, 'tis debtor to him I'll be; but sstrong men are they that ride in his train."

"What shall be done shall ye see," says the ould man, flashin' fire like the sun on steel from the deep eyes o' him. "Now lead us to Curigh Mor, an' leave yer fearin' for us."

Wide were the eyes of Eimer to see the wather o' the ford ddraw back to let the two pass dhy shod. Thremblin' came on her, an' silent she led the two up the path to the castle. Yet at the gate she waited a bit, lookin' from the bent ould beggar man, worn and slow step-

pin', to the bright youth, richly clad, that followed him as a man his masther.

"Betther that ye come no farther, riskin' yer lives for a servin' maid," says she. "A rough man is Curigh Mor."

"Then rougher shall he find us," says the ould man. "Go you an' tell him that two strangers crave shelter for the night."

"Twas before the main gateway they were now, an' as Eimer slipped in away from them, it seemed to Rodan as a swirl o' mist had wrapped her from sight.

"An' what for an' whatever a castle may this be?" he asked, wondherin' not a little at the quare silence all round, for never a bird sang in any tree, nor child played on the meadow beyant, nor chatter o' maids an' men came from the courtyards or archways. Only a dull rushin' sound o' storm far underground was round them.

"The place o' one not to be trusted with power above that o' men that were his masthers afore," says the ould man, gruff an' short.

"An' have we strength to cast him from it?" cried Rodan, his face flushin' with eagerness,

an' his heart hot with rage at Curigh Mor for layin' heavy hand on a tender lass with none to guard her.

"Ay, that may ye do alone. Hearken to me, Rodan. A lad are ye yet, but power shall be given ye if yer heart fail ye not. That which I lost has Curigh Mor found an' turned to evil uses. One chance will I give him to mend his ways, an' if he refuse me that which is me own, then do ye stand forth me champion an' offer battle to all who come, beginnin' with a man o' yer own years. An' the power of each man ye overcome shall be added to yer own, an' a mighty champion shall ye be held afther. But mind this through the battlin'. All in all is it to ye that ye let no fear come nigh yer heart, even though a giant were challengin'."

An' Rodan nodded, gay an' blithe at the words o' the beggar man. Afther a minute more, the gate opened, an' a great slouchin' fellow put out his head.

"What seek ye, beggars, at the door o' Curigh Mor, the mighty King o' Three Winds that work his will night an' day?" says he.

"'Tis a smith I am," says the ould man, "an'

by ill fortune I was afther losin' me hammer.
'Tis seekin' it through all lands I am, for its
mate has never been seen far nor wide. 'Tis
askin' I'd be whether Curigh Mor has found
it."

"Come in," says the gatekeeper. So in they
went, an' before them was the wide courtyard.
At the farther side stood a knot o' men, an' to
them the gatekeeper pointed.

"Go to them," says he. "There stands Curigh
Mor, with the sstrongest champions o' his court.
But 'tis riskin yer ould skin an' bones ye are.
Better for ye to go sound an' safe, if wantin'
yer hammer, than to cross the King o' the Three
Winds."

But the ould smith shook off the hand o' the
one that would have warned him back, an'
beckoned Rodan, an' together they passed
across the open space.

Those standin' nigh to Curigh Mor laughed
at seeing the ould bent gaffer hobblin' along, an'
a bright young lad, that was yet scarce come to
man's years, comin' afther with his arm filled
with rusty chains. But a chill went over the

heart o' Curigh Mor, an' he drew his rich cloak closer round him.

“What seek ye, beardin' the King o' the Three Winds?” says he.

“The help o' Curigh Mor to give me back that which is me own,” says the ould smith.

“An' what may that be?” asked Curigh Mor, scowlin' fierce an' angered like.

“Me hammer,” says the ould beggar. “ 'Twas restin' a bit from me forgin' on a suit of armour I was, an' let it slip from me hand; an' when I would have gone back to me work, 'twas gone; an' ever since have I been searchin' vainly for it. A gift from a mighty hand it was, with powers like none other; for glowin' with fire is it, an' needs no guidin' for doin' its work. Golden is its handle, an' wrought with sstrange runes an' spells.”

He looked waitin' at Curigh Mor, that shouted rough like—

“Nay, be off with yees! I know naught o' yer hammer!”

“A fine thing, that, for any to be afther givin' to a beggar man,” chuckled a quare bit of a dwarf that was sittin' cross-legged nigh them.

“Maybe ye’ve stolen his cloak o’ silver cloth, forbye his hammer, Curigh Mor; to speak naught o’ his fine suit o’ bronze armour an’ the torc o’ wrought gold from his neck.”

An’ while all round were shakin’ an’ laughin’ at the angered face o’ the ould smith, Rodan was keepin’ eye on Curigh Mor. A tall, dark, heavy man was he, an’ with lowerin’ brows an’ great black beard like many o’ those nigh. An’ bein’ as it was warm in the sun, Rodan was wonderin’ how it was that he kept his cloak so tight held to him. An’ as he was lookin’, the ould smith raised his hand with the fourth chain, an’ the corner o’ Curigh Mor’s mantle blew aside. An’ beneath Rodan saw, hangin’ from his belt, a hammer, with handle o’ wrought gold; an’ the head o’ that same was glowin’ like a coal o’ fire in the wind.

Never waitin’ to think what might come, Rodan sprang forward an’ struck Curigh Mor on the breast.

“ ‘Tis a false thafe ye are!” says he, fearless. “Give back the hammer, lest evil come on ye an’ all in yer ill-gotten castle. The son of a warrior am I, an’ sister’s son to Mahon o’ Rosnaree, an’

no man's man but his, that was once aided in need by this man ye're afther showin' scorn to. An' every man in yer court do I challenge to fight for it, takin' one o' me own years first, an' then one sthonger—till I come to yerself, Curigh Mor, that was born no king, but thrall of a betther man nor stands jeerin' by ye. An' the hammer shall ye return to him that owns it by right; an' Eimer, daughter o' Duach o' the Ford, shall ye free, an' give gold in king's measure for forcin' her to serve the cowards that serve ye, thrall an' traitor an' thafe!"

Then was Curigh Mor ragin' past words. He beckoned to a young fightin' man that stood by, an' pointed to Rodan. An' 'twas few words were needed there. Swords were out, an' silent were all as the wind o' yester morn—while clash! went steel on steel. An' before Curigh Mor had fair taken breath to watch the out-comin', sure Rodan had sthruck down young Seumas, an' had him lyin' at his mercy on the rough stones. Dark wrath was in the face o' the King o' the Three Winds in that hour.

The ould smith signed quick to Rodan to hearken.

"Hang the chains loose on yer arm," says he, whisperin' low, "and if a wind sweeps over ye, cast a chain at it an' take no more heed, for all will go well."

Rodan nodded, light-hearted an' full o' courage, an' stepped out to meet the next man that offered. An' 'twas one broad-shouldhered an' scarred with much battlin' that met him—for many o' the weaker o' Curigh Mor's men began slippin' off quiet like, fearin' to be called on to fight in an ill quarrel.

Now the strength o' two was in Rodan's arm, yet was he pressed hard. An' as the smith watched, sure, one pulled at his arm from behind, an' 'twas Eimer, her face white with dreadin' what might come to the lad.

"Look to Curigh Mor," says she. "'Tis turnin' to the south he is. The wind 'll be afther workin' his wicked will."

"Wait an' see," counselled the smith. "Be ready, too, an' when ye see a chain fall from the hand o' the lad that fights yer battle an' mine, run ye quick an' bring it to me, fearin' naught."

Then Curigh Mor pulled the hammer from his girdle, thinkin' none saw—an' called on the

south wind to dhrive off the beggars. But as it swept up the courtyard, Rodan, never ceasin' his sword playin', threw the first o' the chains from him—an' sudden all was still, the chain lyin' in the dust an' the scarred warrior by it. Eimer hastened quick an' brought it to its right owner, that grasped it an' held it with firm grip, sayin' words that none could make out.

When Curigh Mor saw that the power o' the south wind hindhered Rodan never a bit, he swift loosed the east wind and the west wind, an' like a whirlwind they howled as they met. Scarce knew Rodan where to turn, but out he flung the chains, an' the winds sank, masthered. An' Curigh Mor saw his warriors an' his sthrong fightin' men slinkin' out o' the gate, not wishin' to risk battlin' with that lad. Losin' all wisdom, he dhrew out the hammer that he'd so far hidden close, an' whirled it above his head, meanin' to beat down the young hero that had named him for what he was. But as the great hammer, glowin' an' sparklin', left his hand, flyin' through the air, the ould beggar whistled sharp an' shrill, an' like a bird swervin' in flight the hammer went straight into the knotted hand

o' Lēn the Smith, that had sought it over many lands.

Sure, a hush o' death was there in the court-yard, an' Curigh Mor covered his false head with his arm, while Rodan stood wondherin' that none came against him.

High in air flashed the hammer, held in the sstrong grasp that knew it well. An' in place o' the rags that had covered the ould beggar, armour o' wrought bronze an' a cloak o' silver cloth, an' a torc o' fine gold wrought by no mortal smith glittered in the noon sun. Once he swung his arm, shakin' wide the chains, an' the four winds swept out from him on every side, an' the walls o' Curigh Mor's castle were scattered an' flyin' down the valley side.

Again he whirled the hammer, an' Curigh Mor an' his dwarf, that were all left o' the proud company, shrunk down to no bigger nor yer finger, an' scutthered away an' hid in the leaves.

“ ‘Tis not for little men to be afther showin' courtesy to sstrangers,” says Lēn, laughin’.

Then, towerin' high above the forest trees, where the birds were singin' wild an' free, he

bent an' caught up Rodan an' Eimer, an' back he strode across the land, like the comin' of a thunder-cloud, never settin' them down till he saw, far below, the great dún o' Mahon, chieftain in Rosnaree.

Sure, those within heard the growlin' o' storm, but naught they saw save a dark mist risin' from where stood Rodan, cheerin' Eimer with brave words.

In the flashin' o' lightnin' from above came a long line o' little men in green, carryin' gold an' rich gifts for the daughter o' Duach, to the hall where sat Mahon—but never more did Lén the Smith come wandherin' to Rosnaree, seekin' aught lost by lookin' too long at heroes.

[“An’ now be off with yees for the last time, for I’ve never a tale, nor a thought of a tale, left in me poor ould brain. ‘Tis meself ye’ve blandandhered out of all I ever knew, an’ me mother before me—so out an’ pack an’ seek fortune for yerselves by an’ beyant the fine school ye’re off to the morn’s mornin’.”]

THE END

CENTRAL CIRCULATION
CHILDREN'S ROOM

47

